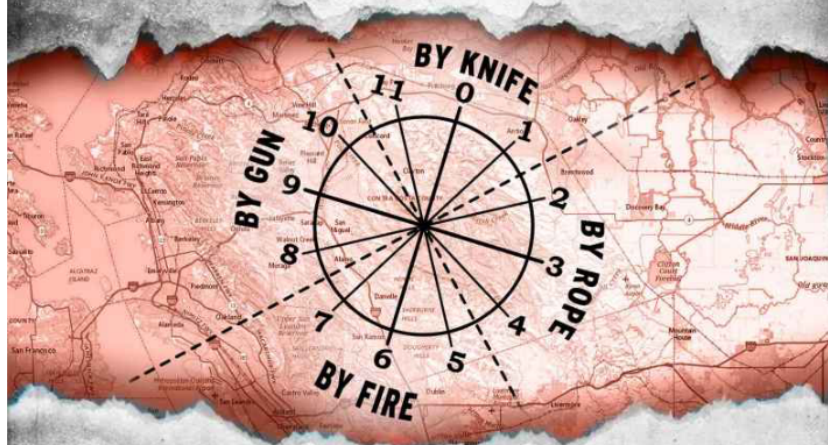


THE ZODIAC REVISITED



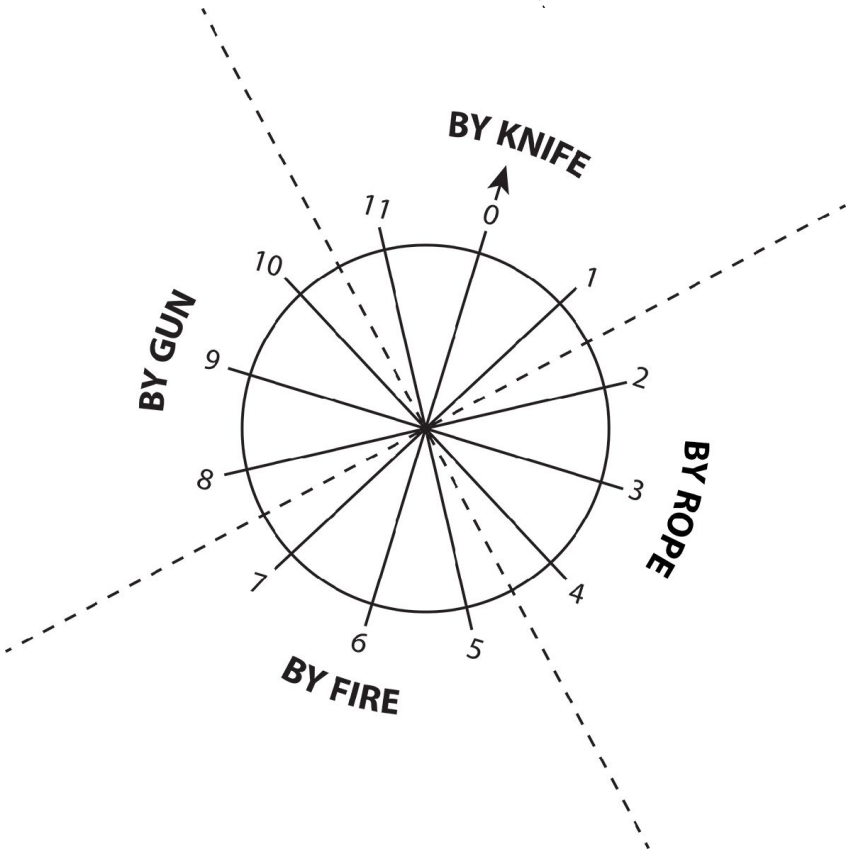
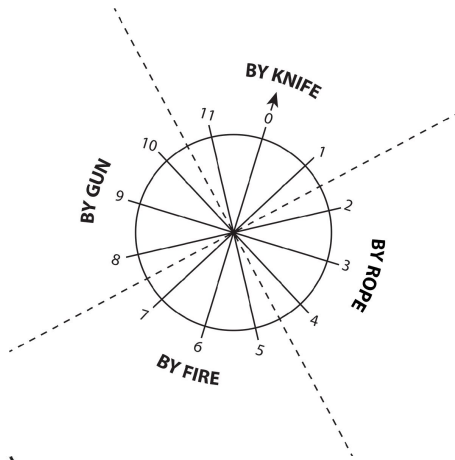
VOLUME 1: THE FACTS OF THE CASE

MICHAEL F. COLE

THE ZODIAC REVISITED

VOLUME 1

The Facts of the Case



Michael F. Cole

Twin Prime Publishing
Folsom, California

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ISBN 978-0-9963943-0-7 (Paperback Edition)

ISBN 978-0-9963943-3-8 (ePub Edition)

ISBN 978-0-9963943-6-9 (Kindle Edition)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020918408

Edited by Jennifer Huston

Cover design by Derek Murphy

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Printed in the United States of America

First printing 2020

Published by Twin Prime Publishing

Folsom, California

zodiacrevisited.com

This book is dedicated to the memories of the following young men and women. Some definitely were victims of the man who called himself the Zodiac; others probably were. Regardless, all left this world much too soon and under circumstances of senseless tragedy.

- Robert Domingos
- Linda Edwards
- Johnny Ray Swindle
- Joyce Swindle
- Cheri Jo Bates
- David Faraday
- Betty Lou Jensen
- Darlene Ferrin
- Cecelia Shepard
- Paul Stine
- Richard Radetich
- Donna Lass

Although the passage of time has rendered the opportunity for justice an impossibility, it's my sincere hope that one day the world will know the name of the person or persons responsible for your unjust fates.

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Acknowledgments

Writing a book is never the accomplishment of a single person. Had it not been for the contributions of a diverse alliance, the pages that you now read would have, long ago, died a death of unrealized potential. For this reason, I am grateful to all who have played a role, whether small or large, in helping me formulate and communicate my thoughts about this tragic yet fascinating mystery.

There are a small number of people whom I must thank explicitly. At the top of this list is my editor, Jennifer Huston. I've learned much over the course of this project, not the least of which is how a book is truly a collaboration between author and editor. I feel very fortunate to have found Jennifer. As you read *The Zodiac Revisited*, please know that Jennifer has played an important role in crafting the finished product.

Derek Murphy created the covers for the three volumes of this series. The old cliché tells us not to judge a book by its cover. In this case, however, I'd be happy to have the books judged by their covers.

I owe much to Tom Voigt, the owner and operator of the website zodiackiller.com. Early on, as my interest in the Zodiac was developing, this website proved invaluable. To this day, it remains a remarkable resource. Additionally, Tom has provided many of the images used throughout *The Zodiac Revisited*. Next, I appreciate the always thoughtful input that I received from author Michael Kelleher. His insights challenged my beliefs in ways that ultimately made these books better. Michael Morford has created a valuable asset that benefits the online Zodiac community, myself included, in the form of zodiackillersite.com. On the subjects of Kathleen Johns and Joyce and Johnny Ray Swindle, I have to acknowledge that I have benefited significantly from the research of Howard Davis. Finally, other people have helped with regard to specific questions, including: Richard Grinell, Eric Shoemaker, Jay Salser, David Brown, Ricardo Eugirtni Gomez, and Scott Stick

The thoughtful review of writing is neither quick nor easy, but receiving such feedback is, perhaps, the best way to make one's writing better. During the creation of these books, I've been the beneficiary of several people reviewing different parts of the work. These people include: Michael Kelleher, Richard Grinell, Tony Garvey, David Oranchak, and Misty Johansen.

To all of the above people and anybody whom I may be failing to remember, I say thank you. I sincerely appreciate your help in making *The Zodiac Revisited* what it is today.

Last but certainly not least, this three volume set of books would

not have been possible had it not been for the support of my wife Ying and our three children, Jason, James, and Jennifer. Having a husband or father who is strangely fascinated by a never-apprehended serial killer is not an easy burden to bear. Furthermore, the opportunity costs I've asked my family to pay so that I might write this book have been significant and, at times, unfair. Yet Ying, Jason, James, and Jennifer have offered nothing but encouragement and support. For allowing me to make this possibility a reality, I will remain forever grateful and appreciative.

Prologue

“The search goes on, in San Francisco, for the man known as the Zodiac Killer.” ¹ That was Walter Cronkite’s opening line to a story on the *CBS Evening News* on Monday, October 20, 1969. Just nine days earlier, the Zodiac had murdered his fifth victim, taxicab driver Paul Stine. To the surprise of many, the killer had violated several of his previously established behavioral patterns. He left the sparsely populated areas of the North Bay and East Bay and, instead, struck within San Francisco itself. He abandoned targeting amorous couples, choosing this time to murder a lone man engaged in the mundane task of earning a living. And most disturbingly, through his writing, he threatened to expand his murderous exploits to children guilty of nothing more than boarding a bus bound for school. The entire Bay Area was in a panic, and understandably so.

Befitting the level of public unrest, the San Francisco media inundated the city’s news-consuming public with a litany of reports about the diabolical serial killer in their midst. Both prominent newspapers, the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*, published one or more articles a day detailing news of the killer. Local television stations broadcast numerous stories. As noted above, even national news organizations reported on the evolving situation in the City by the Bay.

Lost amid the tens of thousands of words crafted in the service of telling the Zodiac story during this time frame was a short article buried on page 9 of the October 22 *Examiner*. Entitled “Cipher Expert Dares Zodiac to ‘Tell’ Name,” ² the story reported on a challenge laid down by the president of the American Cryptogram Association, Professor D. C. B. Marsh, PhD—the same man who had validated a husband and wife’s solution to the killer’s first cipher. In the article, Marsh provocatively declared, “The killer wouldn’t dare... as he has claimed in letters to the newspapers... reveal his name in a cipher to established cryptogram experts.” Dr. Marsh then continued, “I invite ‘Zodiac’ to send... a cipher code—however complicated—which will truly and honestly include his name.”

At the time of its publication, the article was but a small part of a relentless media stream. Undoubtedly, the dare piqued the interest of many Bay Area residents. But when additional developments related to the article failed to materialize, the story began its inevitable fade from public consciousness.

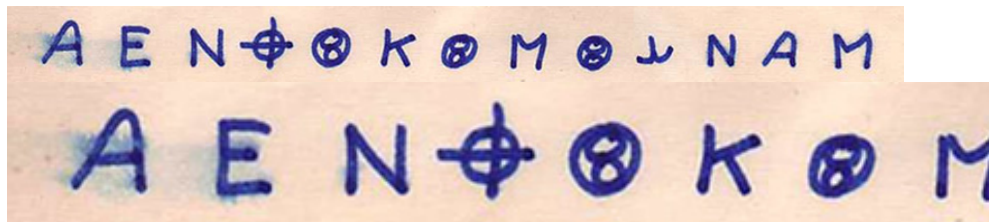


Figure 1: The Zodiac’s “My Name Is” cipher, undoubtedly a response to Dr. D. C. B. Marsh’s dare

Yet, the evidence in the case of the Zodiac suggests one person not only read the story but also vowed to take action in response; namely, the same man who was already responsible for the deaths of at least five young men and women. On April 22—six months to the day after the people of the Bay Area had read about the very public dare that Dr. Marsh had made to the Zodiac—both the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner* reported news of the killer’s most recent letter, one that included a thirteen-symbol cipher introduced by the phrase: “My name is.”^{3,4}

Accepting the dare took longer than most people would have expected; and therefore, the connection has been lost in the various tellings of the Zodiac story. But the circumstances surrounding the cipher make it clear that the killer could not let Marsh’s public challenge go unanswered. Moreover, these same circumstances further suggest that the cryptogram may indeed encipher some version of the killer’s name. Now, five decades into the mystery, this cipher remains one of the few hopes we have for developing new information and possibly solving the case. If only we can find the solution...*

Notes

1. Walter Cronkite, anchor, *CBS Evening News*, Columbia Broadcasting System, October 20, 1969.
2. Will Stevens, “Cipher Expert Dares Zodiac to ‘Tell’ Name,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 22, 1969, 9.
3. Paul Avery, “Zodiac Sends New Letter—Claims Ten,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 22, 1970, 1.
4. Don Branning, “‘Zodiac’ Boasts of 10 Killings,” *San Francisco*

Chapter 1

Introduction

*We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.*¹

John Naisbitt, *Megatrends*, 1982.

The case of the Zodiac remains one of the most enduring mysteries in American criminal-justice history. Although other serial murderers have claimed more victims or caused more pain and suffering through the extreme nature of their crimes, few have augmented their murderous deeds with such a wide and varied array of enigmatic behavior. Few have revealed themselves in such detail through prolific, public writing. And an exceptional few have walked away from their crimes, having managed to evade capture. When considered as a whole, these traits combine to make the story of the Zodiac unique. The world has not witnessed another saga like that of the Zodiac, neither in the years before the drama that unfolded in San Francisco, nor in the years since.

1.1 An Overview

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, an unidentified man terrorized the San Francisco Bay Area. During a ten-month window from December 1968 to October 1969, this man committed four attacks, murdering five people and gravely injuring another two whom he had left for dead.

Not satisfied with the simple act of murder, the killer taunted law enforcement and the public by writing to local newspapers—usually the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Through bizarre and cryptic content—including four ciphers, three* of which have never been solved—the psychopath played a twisted game. Reporters dubbed the man the Cipher Killer, but the murderer chose a different name for himself: the Zodiac.

Although not definitively linked to any later murders, the man continued to write to the *Chronicle* for another year and a half. Through the use of an ever-increasing murder score and other vague references in his writing, the Zodiac wanted people to believe that he was continuing to kill. Sometimes the crimes for which he was claiming responsibility were recognizable, as was the case with a

foiled kidnapping of a young mother[†] and her infant child, the murder of a San Francisco police officer,[‡] and the disappearance and presumptive murder of a Lake Tahoe nurse.[§] Other times, however, there were no obvious connections.

Threats of further violence were a common theme in the Zodiac's writing. Of particular note, the killer obsessed about the idea of murdering children aboard a school bus—first by suggesting he might orchestrate a mass-shooting and later by mailing crude schematics for two different versions of a bomb that he supposedly intended to plant along a bus route.

In March 1971, the Zodiac sent what was to be his last letter before a nearly three-year hiatus. Also around this time, investigators came to realize that the man calling himself the Zodiac may have been responsible for two attacks and three murders in Southern California[¶] prior to his arrival in the Bay Area. Later analysis would lead some people—myself included—to believe that he had also murdered another Southern California couple.^{||}

The killer resurrected his persona one last time to send a final Zodiac letter in January 1974. In it, he updated the supposed murder score to 37—law enforcement still could only account for five. Over the next six months, the unknown man sent a small number of anonymous letters to the *Chronicle*, but not as the persona of the Zodiac. In July 1974, the killer ceased communicating, this time for good.

The case of the Zodiac was thrust back into the limelight for a brief time in 1978 when the *Chronicle* received what appeared to be a new letter from the killer. After experts initially authenticated the communiqué, a regrettable investigative drama resulted in most examiners classifying the letter a fraud.

In the years that followed, substantive developments in the case were few and far between. The publication of Robert Graysmith's book *Zodiac* (1986) was the first large-scale commercial telling of the serial killer's story, although many have argued that Graysmith's handling of the material leaves something to be desired. Over the ensuing years, numerous other books, documentaries, and movies have helped keep the case in the public eye—the most notable being David Fincher's big-budget film *Zodiac* (2007) starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Robert Downey Jr. Unfortunately, none of these treatments has yet proven to be the catalyst that precipitates the solution to the mystery.

1.2 A Mountain of Evidence

With the Zodiac committing so many crimes and communicating so

extensively for so long a time, investigators have been the beneficiaries of an impressive collection of evidence. The killer wrote twenty-plus pages of letters and sent an additional three greeting cards. He crafted four ciphers; one has been solved, the other three have not—at least, not convincingly. Between the letters and the crime scenes, law enforcement has accumulated a large number of fingerprints; some they are certain belong to the killer. Of particular note, one of the partial prints was laced with the blood of a victim and hence almost certainly is that of the killer. Relatedly, the police also have a palm print taken from one of the killer's letters that undoubtedly belongs to him.

There is no shortage of eyewitness accounts, either. Three of the killer's victims, two of whom survived, interacted with him in some way during their respective encounters and, hence, were able to describe the man afterward. Another victim, who was almost certainly abducted by the Zodiac, spent roughly two hours with the killer in his car. Two police switchboard operators talked with the man directly. Two teenagers observed him in the moments after one of his murders; their detailed description resulted in the well-known composite sketch of the killer. Two police officers drove past the man they later suspected to be the killer; they, at the very least, carefully observed the man as he walked by—and if the killer is to be believed, they engaged him in conversation.

With DNA being the cornerstone of modern forensic investigation, it's encouraging to note that this case is not without DNA evidence. In particular, the San Francisco Police Department DNA laboratory extracted a partial DNA profile from a stamp on one of the killer's letters. Admittedly, a partial profile is not as valuable as a full profile. Nevertheless, it still has considerable forensic value. Also, it's always possible that some later reexamination of the evidence will develop a full DNA profile, possibly through the benefit of an as-of-yet undiscovered technological advancement in DNA analysis. Moreover, one of the Southern California murders yielded a mitochondrial DNA profile. This type of DNA is less exclusive than the standard nuclear DNA profile, but it's still potentially valuable.

Beyond these key pieces of evidence, there is also an entire patchwork of miscellany that may one day prove to be equally important. Such evidence includes a cryptically annotated map of California and two diagrams of bombs that the killer sent. There are also three swatches of a victim's bloodstained shirt that the killer used as a means to prove his identity, numerous shell casings found at the crime scenes, a footprint left by the killer and matched to a known shoe type, a pair of gloves found in a murder victim's taxicab, a watch possibly ripped from the attacker's wrist in Southern California, etc.

The list goes on and on.

The case of the Zodiac may be unsolved, but it's not for a lack of evidence.

1.3 Strange Dynamics

Although much is known about the Zodiac and his crimes, little is truly understood. As described above, we have an impressive collection of information. But what we lack is a compelling way to piece together the information. While evidence in the cases of other serial criminals commonly paints a clear picture of the perpetrator, evidence in the case of the Zodiac is at best confusing and at worst self-contradictory. Often, incremental evidence not only fails to answer outstanding questions, but instead, raises new questions of its own, or worse yet, throws into doubt answers previously thought to be understood.

Interestingly, this uncertainty functions like an elaborate Rorschach test. Similar to the way the interpretation of ambiguous inkblots says more about the interpreter than it does about objective truth, so it is with the vague yet plentiful evidence found in the Zodiac mystery. In other words, what people see in the evidence often has more to do with themselves than it does the Zodiac. For example, some people subconsciously want the personal satisfaction of understanding a mad genius; so they see a mad genius whose actions only they can explain. Others are comforted by the idea that the perpetrator was an incompetent fool; so they see a man who undoubtedly would have been caught had it not been for an amazing run of luck. And most commonly of all, many advocate for the guilt of a particular suspect and, not surprisingly, believe that all aspects of the evidence lead to that suspect.

Furthermore, with the killer remaining unidentified for such a long time, the case has evolved to the point where it engenders extreme speculation. Most measured avenues of inquiry were exhausted decades ago to no satisfying end. What we're left with today are plenty of dots to connect and a never-ending supply of people ready and eager to connect them,** all too often without the discomfort of objective, critical thought. Besides elevating the status of the case to some form of mythology, this constant, barely constrained speculation distorts how people perceive the mystery. Sensationalized details end up overshadowing fundamentally important parts of the evidence. The so-called Radian theory (Section 4.3.2.2 of *The Zodiac Revisited*, Volume 2), the belief that the killer was inspired by the Zodiac Watch company, and the too-many-to-track invalid solutions to the killer's cryptograms scream for our attention while subtle details lurking in

the Zodiac's own written words barely manage a whisper. In the end, unsurprisingly, many people come away from the case not knowing what to think or whom to believe.

1.4 Pillars of Principal Importance

Amid the considerable uncertainty found in the case of the Zodiac, there are elements of the evidence that provide tried-and-true footholds for analysis. In particular, three key elements of the case are essential to developing an objective understanding of this enigmatic serial killer.

The Crimes. A criminal is defined by the crimes he or she commits. The Zodiac achieved infamy through his criminal actions. Were it not for the murders and the other heinous crimes committed by the killer, it's difficult to imagine that the man would have garnered much attention. We care about what the Zodiac did and what he had to say precisely because he proved himself willing and able to commit the act of murder.

To be sure, there are many questions surrounding the crimes of the Zodiac. For example, was there any planning in terms of timing, crime-scene location, or victim selection? Was the same man responsible for a string of murders in Southern California before the emergence of the Zodiac persona? These types of questions notwithstanding, the crimes themselves are well documented and, largely, well understood. Through law enforcement records, interviews, news reports, and expert analysis, we have a good sense of *what* happened. Figuring out *why* it happened is part of the challenge of understanding the Zodiac.

The Letters. It's difficult to overstate the analytical value of the twenty-plus pages of handwritten letters authored by the killer himself. Whether crafted with the intention to deceive or a true and accurate version of his thoughts, the ideas embodied in these communiqués provide a window into the mind of the killer, a type of insight that we rarely find with unapprehended serial murderers. The writing's ease of interpretation varies, spanning the spectrum from straightforward to incomprehensible. But the fact that the killer invested the time and effort required to communicate these thoughts means, on some level, he felt them important. Hence, to develop an understanding of the Zodiac, we must carefully consider all the various written communications.

The Reporting. An interesting aspect of the Zodiac mystery is that it happened at a time when newspapers were the primary means by which people received their news. Television reports were prominent, but in an age before consumer video recording and modern television

technology, they were also fleeting in that they required people to tune in at specific times. Newspapers, on the other hand, could be delivered, retained, read, and reread at the convenience of the recipient—a practice steeped in hundreds of years of tradition.

There is little doubt that the Zodiac had an insatiable interest in understanding how law enforcement and the public perceived his criminal persona. Without special access to the inner workings of law enforcement agencies, the killer was undoubtedly forced to use publicly available tools to gauge the impact of his criminal activities and, in particular, he clearly relied on reading Bay Area newspapers—specifically, the *Chronicle*, *Examiner*, and to a lesser extent the *Vallejo Times-Herald*.

A careful reading of the killer's letters reveals, on multiple occasions, newspaper reports directly influenced the content of his writing. By knowing about the relevant articles, we can understand this dynamic and come to view certain parts of his writing as obvious reactions to particular stimuli, which yields further insight into the Zodiac's sensitivities and motivations.

By thoughtfully considering these three fundamental parts of the case—the crimes, letters, and reporting—we will establish an analytical foundation upon which we can build an understanding of the Zodiac.

1.5 How Does It End?

Whether somebody will ever manage to convincingly identify the Zodiac remains an open question. In a sense, the mystery is caught in a tug-of-war. On one side we have the unrelenting passage of time. At the end of each day, this tireless competitor pulls the rope ever so slightly. Moreover, each time a principal participant—be it a surviving victim, a member of a victim's family, an investigator, etc.—leaves this world, time is violently yanking on the rope. As a result, the passage of time's progress is characterized by a daily, slow-and-steady advancement that is occasionally accented by substantial gain.

Trying to withstand this progress, at the other end of the rope, is a team consisting of a large and diverse membership, including all of us who maintain an active interest in the case. Despite this diversity, however, there is one player in particular who will quite likely decide the fate of the contest. That player is the ever-advancing state of technology, who is continually providing new and more sophisticated ways to analyze evidence. Fortunately, for those of us interested in seeing the case resolved, technology is a formidable teammate. But its strength often remains untapped until the state of the art reaches a point where a new technique becomes viable, at which time the force

of the resulting progress can be overwhelming.

As I write these words, the passage of time is undeniably winning, as it has been for several decades now. Ultimately, the outcome of the Zodiac case will likely come down to this question: can technology provide the strength to overcome the passage of time before it's simply too late?

By writing this book, it's my sincere hope that I can incrementally advance the state of the case forward and, in so doing, contribute to the path that will one day lead the world to the identity of the Zodiac.

Chapter 2

Emerging

The beginning is the most important part...

Plato, circa 428–347 BCE

2.1 Lake Herman Road

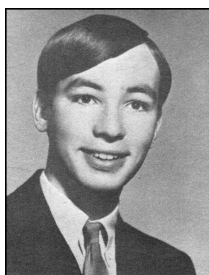
The logical starting point for the story of the Zodiac involves the neighboring cities of Vallejo and Benicia in the northeastern part of the San Francisco Bay Area. Though underappreciated by many, both of these cities played an important role in the storied history of California. In fact, each briefly served as the state's capital before Sacramento finally assumed the title in 1854. But the single most significant historical happening in terms of shaping the later character of these two cities was the US Navy's decision to establish a presence on a nearby peninsula known as Mare Island. In the same year that California moved its capital to Sacramento, the navy began building its first permanent base on the West Coast at Mare Island. From its inception, the Mare Island facility was a shipyard, constructing, repairing, and servicing many of the navy's vessels. With a distinguished record during both world wars and a heavy involvement in the prolific nuclear-submarine era, Mare Island earned and maintained a reputation as the navy's premier shipyard for much of its existence, until it was finally deactivated in 1995.

Employing tens of thousands of military and civilian personnel in its heyday, Mare Island was the primary contributor to the socioeconomic well-being of nearby Vallejo and Benicia. Many people who found employment at Mare Island called one of these neighboring cities home. The naval base was an integral part of the community that came to be characterized by middle-class values, common sense, and a strong work ethic.

By the beginning of December 1968, Vallejo had grown to a population of slightly more than 65,000. David Faraday and Betty Lou Jensen—two successful, studious, and well-adjusted teenagers—were among these residents. An athletic senior at Vallejo High School, David was a member of the wrestling team. Outside of school, he was a longtime member of the Boy Scouts and had ascended to Eagle Scout, the highest achievable rank. Betty was a well-liked honor student in her junior year at nearby Hogan High School. In mid-

December, fate brought the two teenagers together when they decorated a local venue for an upcoming social event. The dynamics of teenage romance being what they were (and still are), David and Betty fell for each other hard and fast. Over the course of the next week, the teenagers modified their daily routines in order to spend time together, with David picking up Betty from school multiple times.

Betty's parents had prohibited her from dating, but somehow she managed to persuade them to let her go out with David. Hence, it was to be her first date. Once her parents consented, the couple made plans for the evening of Friday, December 20. When the day arrived, the teenagers spent the late afternoon together, as they commonly did, before briefly going their separate ways at about 6:00 p.m. Two hours later, David returned to Betty's house, where she introduced him to her parents and the obligatory conversation ensued. By 8:20 p.m., the eager couple climbed into David's station wagon, and they were on their way. The plan, as told to Betty's parents, was to attend a Christmas concert at Hogan High School, continue on to a local party at a friend's house, and return by 11:00 p.m.



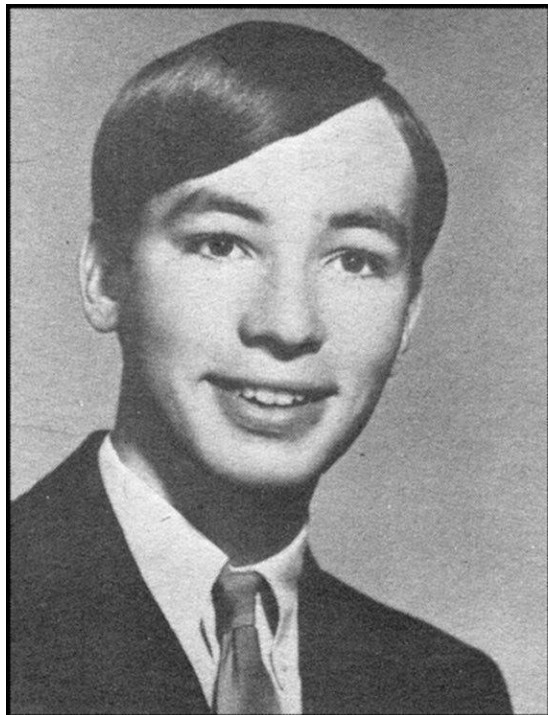


Figure 2.1: David Faraday and Betty Lou Jensen near the time of their death. Image courtesy of the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum (David Faraday) and Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com (Betty Lou Jensen).

As is sometimes the case with even the most well-behaved teenagers, David and Betty told her parents one thing and proceeded to do another. In particular, they did not attend the Christmas concert at Hogan High School. Rather, they left the Jensen residence and visited another friend of Betty's. Around 9:00 p.m., the friend escorted the couple back to David's station wagon and, again, they departed.¹ The whereabouts and activities of David and Betty during the next two hours or so are not precisely known, although one source claims that they visited a popular local restaurant and hangout called Mr. Ed's.²

A subset of the Zodiac's crimes—including this one—have a curious thread running through them in that they took place near man-made reservoirs that were originally engineered to address the water-consumption needs of Northern Californians. Lake Herman is one such reservoir. Before the reservoir's construction in 1905, reliably providing water to the inhabitants of Vallejo and Benicia had been a difficult task because of the hilliness of the landscape, the absence of usable well water, and the lack of natural waterways. But with the creation of Lake Herman, nearby residents found themselves the beneficiaries of water reserves capable of lasting several years.

Needless to say, the reservoir was a welcome bit of infrastructure; although nowadays it is primarily used for irrigation purposes.

Just as it was in 1968, Lake Herman Road is a small, two-lane thoroughfare that runs past the eponymous body of water and connects the neighboring cities of Vallejo and Benicia. At the time of the Zodiac murders, the road was lightly traveled and poorly lit. For these reasons, local teenagers used portions of Lake Herman Road as a lovers' lane. But, unlike the images that one might typically conjure up when envisioning a lovers' lane, Lake Herman Road offered no seclusion from passersby. In other words, young couples could pull off to the side of the road and enjoy the intimacy created by the darkness and infrequent interruptions, but when vehicles did happen by, there was nothing to obscure the view of the parked automobiles.

Sometime just before 11:00 p.m., David and Betty made their way to a common lovers' lane turnout at the entrance to the Benicia Pumping Station on Lake Herman Road. Several eyewitnesses placed the couple inside David's parked station wagon, including multiple people traveling as the result of a shift change at a local construction project.³

At 11:15 p.m., local resident Stella Borges drove past the entrance to the pumping station on her way to pick up her son from a movie theater. As her headlights came upon the turnout, she and the other passengers in her car saw the bodies of the two teenagers on the ground. David "looked like he had fallen out of the open door" of his station wagon.⁴ Betty was farther away, lying on her side and facing the road. Concluding that something was terribly wrong, Stella continued into Benicia as fast as possible. Once there, she quickly spotted a police officer, attracted his attention, and reported what she'd seen.

Shortly thereafter, members of the Benicia and Vallejo Police Departments and the Solano County Sheriff's Office descended upon the scene. Although the teenagers were from Vallejo, the crime scene was located just inside Benicia. Regardless, the Solano County Sheriff's Office had jurisdiction over the particular location, and hence, they took ownership of the investigation. Officers from Benicia and Vallejo assisted.

Betty was pronounced dead at the scene. David, on the other hand, was still breathing when officers first arrived.⁵ He was rushed by ambulance to Vallejo General Hospital, but at 12:05 a.m., he was pronounced dead on arrival.

Forensic evidence and crime-scene analysis painted the following picture. The couple was forcibly coerced out of David's station wagon through the passenger's-side door. Once out, David was shot one time at point-blank range behind the left ear. Betty began to run. She made

it about 30 feet from the car before being felled by the killer's weapon. In total, she was shot five times in the back, with one of the shots piercing her heart.

Investigators determined that the weapon was a .22-caliber semiautomatic. Ten shell casings had been ejected from the firearm and were recovered at the scene. They were copper-coated Winchester-Western Super-X long-rifle shells. Investigators initially believed the weapon was a rifle, however, later analysis by the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation suggested the weapon was a pistol, either a J. C. Higgins Model 80 or a High Standard M-101 Duramatic.⁶ These two models were actually the same pistol; the former was a Sears-branded version of the latter. Relatedly, the clip capacity for this firearm was ten rounds, hence, the assailant probably finished his murderous assault by emptying the weapon's clip while shooting at Betty.

Also of note, the killer had fired a single shot into the right-rear window of the station wagon. Moreover, all doors, except the open passenger door, were locked.³ An eyewitness had driven past the crime scene just before the estimated time of the attack. He reported seeing David's Rambler and another car parked farther away from the road to the right of David's vehicle. Unfortunately, the witness couldn't provide any additional details about this second car.⁷

Taken together, the available information led investigators to believe the assailant had parked next to David's vehicle and approached the station wagon from the right rear. He probably tried to persuade the couple to exit the station wagon and they refused. Sergeant Leslie Lundblad of the Solano County Sheriff's office speculated that, at this point, the murderer fired a single shot into the rear of the car to coerce the couple into compliance. The shot had the desired effect. Betty unlocked her door and both she and David exited the vehicle through the passenger's-side door.³

Because it appeared that nothing of value had been taken from the car, robbery was ruled out as a possible motive. Investigators were also quick to point out that Betty had not been sexually assaulted in any way—nevertheless, law enforcement continued to entertain the possibility that sexual assault had been the killer's original motive. But detectives initially invested more effort into the possibility that the murderer was somebody known to either Betty, David, or both of them, with a particular emphasis on the possibility that the perpetrator had been a "rejected suitor" of Betty's.⁸

Yet from the beginning, Lundblad acknowledged that "the killings could have been done without a motive, perhaps by a demented person".⁸ Two days into the investigation, a strange twist occurred that lent credence to this possibility. A young man named William

Crow had read about the details of the murders in the newspaper. He contacted the sheriff's office and relayed a curious story. William had been driving his girlfriend's new sports car on Lake Herman Road the evening of the murders, about an hour and a half before David and Betty were gunned down. The young man had stopped at the entrance to the Benicia Pumping Station, the exact scene of the crime. The sports car was unusual in that it had toggle switches that the driver used to control various aspects of automotive function. As William's girlfriend was explaining the purpose of each toggle switch, the two observed a car approaching from the Benicia direction. The vehicle passed their location and then stopped in the road. At that point, the car's reverse lights came on. William immediately had a bad feeling about the situation, so he put the car in gear and left the area, driving toward Benicia at a high rate of speed. The other car made a three-point turn and followed them at a similar speed. About a half mile later, William turned off and headed toward Benicia, while the other car remained on Lake Herman Road.³

On Monday, December 23, David and Betty were laid to rest.⁸ A day and a half later, the friends and family of David and Betty awoke to Christmas morning. The holiday must have felt like an unwelcomed, out-of-place reminder of a world that continued on without regard to individual grief or hardship. Law enforcement followed up on the leads they developed, but the gears of progress soon ground to a halt. There simply wasn't much to go on. On December 24, the *Chronicle's* last, short article about the murders was buried on page 32. In it, Solano County detectives conceded they had "nothing concrete." The final sentence of the article summed up the sentiment in a way that feels especially apropos; in the words of one of the detectives: "It was all so needless."⁹

2.2 Blue Rock Springs

The murders of David Faraday and Betty Lou Jensen inflicted a shock on the community in and around Vallejo—a shock whose impact was profound and long-lasting. The passage of time did not reduce the significance of the loss incurred by the community, but it did, as it always does, dull the intensity with which people modified their behavior in response to the murders. In short, people moved on with their lives, and over time, life in the community returned to the level of normalcy seen in the days prior to the murders. As spring turned to summer in 1969, the community began to think of the events of December 20, 1968, as a merely sad and inexplicable aberration. But this return to normalcy was to be short-lived.

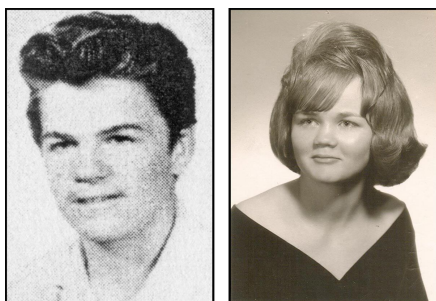
In June 1969, Darlene Ferrin was an attractive and personable

twenty-two-year-old living in Vallejo with her husband, Dean, and their infant daughter. Darlene was a waitress at Terry's, a nearby restaurant, and Dean worked as a cook at a local eatery called Caesar's. Like many people in Vallejo, their circumstances were those of hard work and middle-class comfort.

Along with a gift for making friends easily, Darlene also had a charismatic personality that captivated people—men and women alike. Darlene was the kind of person who seemed to know everyone. But more than that, everyone she knew felt a special bond with her—not because of deception or manipulation, but because Darlene had the innate ability to make each relationship special.

Although Darlene was married, she was known to be dating other men. In particular, by early summer she was seeing a young man named Mike Mageau.

Mike and his twin brother, Steven, met Darlene one fateful evening when they sat in her section at Terry's. Unsurprisingly, the twins were instantly attracted to the dynamic young woman—Dea as they would come to know her—and the brothers vied for her attention. But, eventually, Mike won out. Unbeknownst to all involved, it was this relationship that would indirectly lead to Darlene's demise and to a harrowing, near-death experience for Mike.



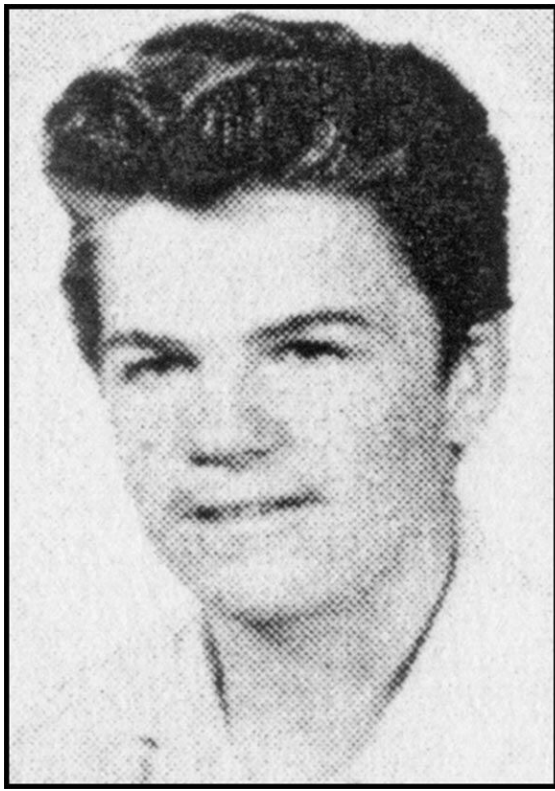


Figure 2.2: Mike Mageau and Darlene Ferrin. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

The following are the events of July 4, 1969, as recounted by Mike Mageau from his bed in the Intensive Care Unit of Vallejo's Kaiser Hospital.¹⁰

Around 4:00 p.m., Mike and Darlene made plans to go see a movie in San Francisco later that evening. Darlene was supposed to pick up Mike at 7:30 p.m., but the designated time came and went. Around 8:00 p.m. Darlene called to say that she had to take her sister to the Miss Firecracker festivities—her sister was a runner-up in the annual Fourth of July contest.¹¹ Darlene told Mike she would call when she was done. She called at 10:30 p.m. to say she would be over shortly. Another hour came and went before she finally arrived. Mike climbed into her car and the two departed.

By the time Darlene picked up Mike, the couple had abandoned the idea of going to San Francisco—aside from the lateness of the hour, Darlene had agreed to have a small Independence Day party with her husband and some of his coworkers once they finished working the evening shift. Instead, Darlene and Mike decided to get a bite to eat. But on the way, Darlene said she needed to talk to Mike

about something, so they stopped in the parking lot of Blue Rock Springs—a local park—to have a conversation.

Darlene maneuvered her Corvair into the empty lot. She turned off the lights and engine but left the radio playing. After a few minutes, they were interrupted by three cars, presumably driven by local teenagers. The loud and rowdy occupants of the cars engaged in some Fourth of July revelry, setting off firecrackers before disappearing into the night. A short time later, Darlene and Mike's seclusion was again disturbed when another car pulled into the parking lot. This time, however, the lone driver turned off his lights and parked about eight feet behind Darlene's Corvair, on the driver's side. For the next minute or so, the mysterious motorist did nothing.

Mike asked Darlene whether she knew who the person was, to which she replied: "Oh, never mind." The ambiguous response left Mike unsure of the answer. Regardless, he didn't push Darlene to clarify and, shortly thereafter, the man drove away, heading toward Vallejo.

Alone again, the couple continued their conversation until, after about five minutes, the mystery vehicle returned. This time, however, the driver parked roughly ten feet behind the passenger's side of Darlene's car. With his headlights still on, the man exited his vehicle and approached the passenger's-side door of the Corvair.

Because the man was carrying a large, high-powered flashlight that he was shining into the car, Darlene and Mike concluded that the man was a police officer. Consequently, Mike began to take out his identification in anticipation of being asked for it.

Given the summertime temperature, Mike's window was already rolled down. When the man arrived at the door, without saying a word, he began firing a semiautomatic weapon into the car. Initially, the assailant focused his deadly attention squarely on Mike, who sustained several gunshot wounds to the back, neck, mouth, and elsewhere.

With the male threat minimized, the killer directed his attention at Darlene, whom he shot repeatedly. Seemingly satisfied with the state of his murderous deed, the killer started to walk back to his vehicle. At this point, Mike—probably reacting to his severe pain—yelled out in a way that attracted the killer's attention. The assailant returned to the passenger's-side door and shot each victim an additional two times.

Undoubtedly convinced that the couple was mortally wounded, the killer again returned to his car and sped away.

The passenger door of Darlene's car had a preexisting problem whereby the door could not be opened from the inside. As the killer was leaving, Mike managed to maneuver himself into position to

operate the outside handle. He fell out of Darlene's car and onto the ground in time to observe the assailant turn around and drive away. Mike described the car as similar to Darlene's brown Corvair, although perhaps a lighter shade of brown. Interestingly, he also got a look at the license plate. He identified it as an older-style California plate, but he couldn't make out any of the letters or numbers.

Approximately ten minutes passed before a car with three young adults stumbled across the scene. After briefly talking with Mike, the three quickly left to report the gruesome discovery to police. Officers from the Vallejo Police Department arrived on the scene soon after.

The responding officers found Mike lying on the ground slightly behind the open passenger door of Darlene's car. The vehicle's headlights and left turn signal were both on, and the radio was playing. Although in an immense amount of pain, Mike managed to provide officers with some basic details about what happened. Darlene, on the other hand, was breathing shallowly and could do nothing more than groan when questioned by police.

Both victims were rushed by ambulance to Kaiser Hospital. Sadly, Darlene died en route. Mike was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit where he soon underwent surgery and began his long journey toward recovery.

As the officers from the Vallejo Police Department began the arduous task of processing the Blue Rock Springs crime scene, the killer himself had one more card left to play. At 12:40 a.m. he placed a call to the Vallejo Police Department and made the following statement to the switchboard operator:

*I want to report a double murder. If you will go one mile east on Columbus Parkway to the public park, you will find the kids in a brown car. They were shot with a 9-millimeter Luger. I also killed those kids last year. Good-bye.*¹²

The caller said "Good-bye" in an especially long, drawn-out, and taunting manner.* Within minutes, authorities determined that the call had originated from a pay phone at a local gas station just seven-tenths of a mile from the police station. Not only was the call itself intended to taunt police, but so too was the location from which it was made. In the disturbed mind of the murderer, it wasn't enough to deliver the provocative and callous message; he wanted the Vallejo Police Department to know that he was close by when he did it. Predictably, by the time police arrived at the phone booth, the man who had placed the call was gone.

As a side note that offers some perspective into the events of the evening, one of the Vallejo officers reported he had checked the Blue Rock Springs parking lot just fifteen minutes before the first radio

notification of the shooting, and the parking lot had been empty.⁵ The time of this drive-by was likely just minutes before Darlene and Mike arrived. Additionally, another officer stopped and arrested a couple who had the misfortune of being in the area of the crime scene as the police were arriving. They were later released. The significance of these two bookends is that there was a rather small window of opportunity for the assailant to strike; even so, that's exactly what he did.

The investigation subsequently produced another witness of sorts who provided some additional insight into the details of the shooting. The park where Mike and Darlene were attacked was next to the Blue Rock Springs Golf Course. As it turned out, the caretaker for the course lived in a small house located roughly 800 feet from the scene of the crime. The caretaker himself had gone to bed before the attack, but his son, George Bryant, was lying awake and looking out his bedroom window when it happened. Unfortunately, George's view was obstructed by trees, so he wasn't able to see anything. Nevertheless, he did hear the events as they unfolded.

Initially, George heard laughing and then firecrackers. This claim is consistent with the teenagers Mike described as driving through the parking lot before the first appearance of the assailant. After some time, near midnight, George heard what he thought was a single gunshot. After a short pause, he heard another single gunshot. Then, after another short pause, George heard a weapon being fired several times in rapid succession. When the gunshots stopped, he heard a car leave the parking lot; it accelerated quickly and squealed its tires in the process.¹³

George was adamant that the gunshots were much louder than the firecrackers. This observation contradicts Mike's description of the gunfire; he claimed it was "muffled" and sounded as if the gunman had used a silencer. But, given the life-threatening trauma Mike was enduring and the relative calm of George's environment, the circumstances suggest that George's observation is likely more accurate.

In the days following the murder, the *Vallejo Times-Herald* conveyed most of the crime's details. One notable exception, however, were the details of the statement made by the anonymous caller; some parts were omitted and other parts were modified, presumably at the request of law enforcement. Specifically, the newspaper reported the statement as:

*I shot them. I used a nine-millimeter automatic.*¹⁴

Of particular note, the term *Luger* had been replaced with the more

general *automatic*, providing an opportunity for the perpetrator to verify his identity, should the need arise.

On July 8, the newspaper finally disclosed that the killer had also explicitly taken credit for the previous murders of David Faraday and Betty Lou Jensen. With the two fatal attacks occurring slightly more than four miles apart, the area's return to relative normality was all but shattered. The residents of Vallejo and the nearby communities were forced to confront an unpleasant reality: there was a killer in their midst—a killer who appeared to be acting in a way that defied rational explanation. As one police officer put it: “We’ve got a crazy man on the loose.”¹⁵

2.3 The Initial Letters and 408 Cipher— July 31, 1969

On Thursday, July 31, 1969, the man who would soon come to be known as the Zodiac ventured into San Francisco and nonchalantly dropped three letters into a public mailbox. This act set into motion events that would soon transform the bizarre and seemingly irrational Vallejo homicides into merely the first pieces of a larger puzzle—a puzzle that is now, perhaps, the most perplexing mystery in American criminal-justice history.

The recipients of the murderer's missives were three Bay Area newspapers. The first was the *Vallejo Times-Herald*, undoubtedly chosen due to its proximity to the crime scenes. The other newspapers were the two largest in the Bay Area, namely, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner*.

The contents of the three letters were generally the same, with each slightly adjusted to reflect the recipient newspaper as well as the other two newspapers, which the killer referenced by name. The first page of the *Chronicle's* letter is shown in Figure 2.3 while Figure 2.4 shows the full contents of the same letter.

Dear Editor

This is the murderer of the
2 teenagers last Christmas
at Lake Herman & the girl
on the 4th of July near
the golf course in Vallejo

To prove I killed them I
shall state some facts which
only I & the police know.

Christmas

- 1 Brand name of ammo
Super X
 - 2 10 shots were fired
 - 3 the boy was on his back
with his feet to the car
 - 4 the girl was on her right
side feet to the west
- 4th July

- 1 girl was wearing patterned
slacks
 - 2 The boy was also shot in
the knee.
 - 3 Brand name of ammo was
Western
- Over

Dear Editor

This is the murderer of
2 teenagers last Ch
at Lake Herman & +
on the 4th of Jan
the golf course in V
To prove I killed
shall state some facts
only I & the police
Christmas

- 1 Brand name of
Super X
- 2 10 shots were
- 3 the boy was on
with his feet to
- 4 the girl was on
side feet to the
- 4th Sally

- 1 girl was wearing
slacks
- 2 The boy was also
the knee.
- 3 Brand name of anti
Western
O.V.

Figure 2.3: The first page of the letter mailed to the San Francisco Chronicle,

Accompanying each letter was a coded message, or more precisely, a cipher—a form of cryptographic communication in which letters from the alphabet are replaced with one or more symbols. Each cipher was unique and complementary. In other words, once all three ciphers were solved and the appropriate order was determined, the three parts would form a single, unified message.

The timing surrounding these letters was curious. All three of the communications were postmarked on the afternoon of Thursday, July 31. Yet an ultimatum contained within the communiqués demanded that the newspapers publish the ciphers by the following afternoon or the killer vowed to murder a dozen people. Had any sort of minor hiccup occurred, such as a letter being delayed or misrouted, the affected newspapers would not have been able to comply with the killer's demand, even if they had been willing.

Dear Editor

*This is the murderer of the
2 teenagers last Christmass
at Lake Herman + the girl
on the 4th of July near
the golf course in Vallejo
To prove I killed them I
shall state some facts which
only I + the police know.*

Christmass

1 Brand name of ammo

Super X

2 10 shots were fired

3 the boy was on his back

with his feet to the car

4 the girl was on her right

side feet to the west

4th July

1 girl was wearing patterned

slacks

2 The boy was also shot in

the knee.

3 Brand name of ammo was

Western

Over

Here is part of a cipher the
other 2 parts of this cipher are
being mailed to the editors of
the Vallejo times + SF Exam
iner.

I want you to print this cipher
on the frunt page of your
paper. **In this cipher is my
identity.**

If you do not print this cipher
by the afternoon of Fry. 1st of
Aug 69, I will go on a kill ram-
Page Fry. night. I will cruse
around all weekend killing lone
people in the night then move
on to kill again, untill I end
up with a dozen people over
the weekend.

Figure 2.4: The full text of the Zodiac's two-page letter sent to the *Chronicle*. Mistakes are reproduced faithfully. The letters to the *Examiner* and *Times-Herald* were similar, with the newspaper names adjusted appropriately. The one notable exception is the highlighted sentence which was included only in the *Chronicle*'s letter.

During the Zodiac era, the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner* were competing newspapers who cooperated under the rules of a joint operating agreement. The *Chronicle* served as the city's morning paper, while the *Examiner* was published in the afternoon. On Sundays, the two dailies pooled their resources and published an extensive joint edition. Vallejo had a similar arrangement with the *Vallejo Times-Herald* being the morning paper and the *Vallejo Evening News-Chronicle* being the afternoon edition. In the case of Vallejo, however, both papers were owned and operated by the same person, Luther Gibson.

Given these circumstances, the Zodiac's demand regarding publication amounted to having the *Examiner* and *News-Chronicle* publish their parts of the cipher on the front page of their respective Friday afternoon editions and, presumably, having the *Chronicle* do

the same on Saturday morning. Only the *News-Chronicle* fully complied with the killer's instruction.¹⁶ The *Examiner* ran a Friday story detailing the arrival of its letter, but the newspaper neither included its third of the cipher nor published the story on the front page, opting instead for page 3.¹⁷ On Saturday, both the *Chronicle* and the *Times-Herald* followed suit and published stories on pages 4 and 1 respectively.^{18,19} The *Chronicle*'s story did include its third of the cipher. The *Times-Herald*, on the other hand, included the sections of the cipher from the *other* two newspapers but not the one it had received. Presumably, the paper chose to omit its own part of the cipher because it had been published in the previous day's *News-Chronicle*. It wasn't until the Sunday, August 3 joint edition of the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* that all three sections of the cipher were finally published together, on page A9.²⁰ The article was titled "Vallejo Mass Murder Threat Fails," a synopsis that the killer surely found less than flattering. This story was also noteworthy because it was the first to feature the moniker "the Cipher Killer," which the press would soon use frequently to refer to the unapprehended murderer. The name stuck after many concerned citizens, who had called police to inquire about the status of the investigation, had used the phrase to describe the fugitive.

The undisclosed information that the killer shared with the newspapers in the three letters of July 31 was almost certainly sufficient to convince law enforcement that the individual was indeed responsible for the murders. However, veteran law enforcement officer and Chief of the Vallejo Police Department Jack Stiltz recognized an opportunity and seized it immediately. Instead of conceding that the killer sent the letters, he argued that it was conceivable somebody who had been at the crime scenes could have acquired such knowledge. Therefore, he urged the author to provide additional details in order to establish his alleged identity. Clearly, Stiltz's motivation was to goad the killer into penning another letter in the hopes that it might provide additional clues or physical evidence.

TOP

NK ⊕ S C E / Δ □ □ Z F A P □ B V
9 3 X ⊙ W ⊙ □ F □ ▲ ⊕ □ Δ A Δ B
□ O T ⊙ R U ⊕ + □ ⊙ Y ⊙ □ Λ S ⊙ W
V Z E G Y K E □ T Y A Δ □ □ L ⊥ □
H I F B X Δ ⊕ X A D ⊙ \ Δ L I T ⊙
□ E ⊙ □ □ ⊙ E ⊙ P O R X ⊙ F □ G ⊕
Z □ J T ⊥ ⊙ □ ▲ J I + Я B P Q W ⊙
V E X Я Δ W I ⊙ ⊙ E H M ⊕ X U I K

11:45



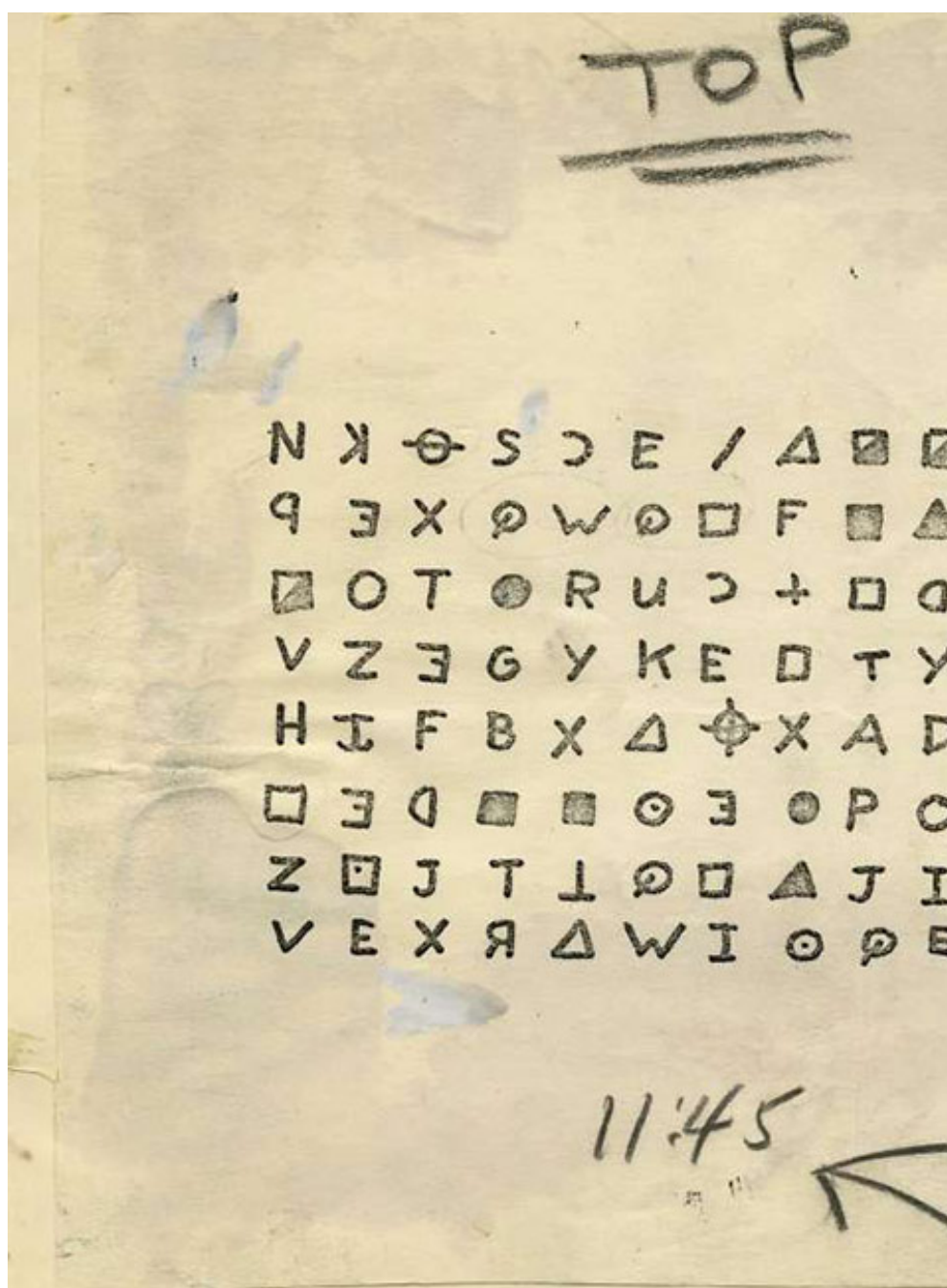


Figure 2.5: The section of the 408 cipher that the Zodiac sent to the *San Francisco Examiner*. Image reproduced with permission from the *San Francisco Chronicle* / Polaris.

Meanwhile, to solve the killer's cipher, Stiltz enlisted the help of the Cryptographic Unit of the US Navy Radio Station on nearby

Skaggs Island. Undoubtedly, these professional analysts would have solved the cipher had they been given enough time. But before that happened, the solution presented itself through other means. As it turned out, the key to unraveling the solution was to make the cipher public. On August 3, with all three sections of the cipher prominently displayed to the combined circulation of the *Chronicle* and *Examiner*, hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the Bay Area attempted to decipher the thoughts of a madman. In the end, it was a couple from Salinas who succeeded.

High school teacher Donald Harden and his wife, Bettye, broke the cipher after “about 20 hours of working on it off and on.”²¹ The solution is shown in Figure 2.6. As is expected with a cipher, each of the author’s symbols represented a letter. The pair unraveled the correct symbol-to-letter assignments after focusing on patterns that represented the word “kill.” Donald explained: “We felt that ‘kill’ would be used more than once.”²² Later, Bettye made a significant breakthrough by identifying the suffix “-ing.” Soon after, the remaining pieces fell into place in quick succession. The Hardens sent the solution to the *Chronicle*, which, in turn, passed it on to the proper authorities. Though the validity of the solution is self-evident even to laypeople, the president of the American Cryptogram Association, Dr. D. C. B. Marsh, authenticated the work, commenting that the cipher was “complicated and obviously drawn by somebody who knows his business.”²³

I LIKE KILLING PEOPLE BECAUSE IT IS SO MUCH FUN.
IT IS MORE FUN THAN KILLING WILD GAME IN THE
FORREST BECAUSE MAN IS THE MOST DANGEROUS ANIMAL
OF ALL. TO KILL SOMETHING GIVES ME THE MOST
THRILLING EXPERENCE. IT IS EVEN BETTER THAN
GETTING YOUR ROCKS OFF WITH A GIRL. THE BEST PART
OF IT IS THAT WHEN I DIE I WILL BE REBORN IN
PARADICE AND ALL THE[†] I HAVE KILLED WILL BECOME
MY SLAVES. I WILL NOT GIVE YOU MY NAME BECAUSE
YOU WILL TRY TO SLOW DOWN OR STOP MY COLLECTING
OF SLAVES FOR MY AFTERLIFE. EBEORIETEMETHHPITI

Figure 2.6: The solution to the 408 cipher—so named because it contains 408 characters. Spaces and periods have been added to show the intended sentence structure. Mistakes have been left uncorrected.

The last 18 letters of the solution appear to be nonsensical. Numerous people, including Dr. Marsh and one of the original

investigating detectives, speculated that the letters may represent some type of secondary cipher or code that further encrypts the author's name.²³ For his part, Donald Harden remained skeptical of the possibility.²⁴ To date, no such convincing interpretation has been discovered, and, for reasons that will be addressed in Section 5.2.2 of *The Zodiac Revisited, Volume 2*, it's a near certainty that no such solution exists.

Relatedly, an anonymous "concerned citizen" mailed the Vallejo Police Department a solution to the cipher that the FBI described as "generally valid."²⁵ The postmark on the communiqué was August 10—the day *after* the first stories documenting the Hardens' solution were published.^{21,22,26} Some people have suggested that the killer himself may have been the source of this anonymous decipherment; but there are several reasons to discount this possibility, not the least of which is that the solution probably would have contained fewer mistakes had it been sent by the cipher's creator. In all probability, this person, whoever he or she was, independently solved the cryptogram and mailed the solution to authorities in a genuine effort to be helpful but, otherwise, chose not to become involved.

2.4 The Debut of the Zodiac Letter— August 4, 1969

Although he surely understood the motives behind Police Chief Stiltz asking for additional, identity-verifying details, the killer happily obliged the request and he immediately sent a second letter to the *Examiner*.[‡] The newspaper published much of the letter along with an image that depicted the author's actual handwriting. In this missive, the killer first used the foreboding introductory phrase that would soon become synonymous with his persona: "This is the Zodiac speaking." The full contents of the *Examiner* letter are shown in Figure 2.7.

Dear Editor

*This is the Zodiac speaking.
In answer to your asking for
more details about the good
times I have had in Vallejo,
I shall be very happy to
supply even more material.
By the way, are the police
having a good time with the*

code? If not, tell them to cheer
up; when they do crack it
they will have me.

On the 4th of July:

*I did not open the car door. The
window was rolled down all ready.
The boy was origionaly sitting in
the front seat when I began
fireing. When I fired the first
shot at his head, he leaped
backwards at the same time
thus spoiling my aim. He end-
ed up on the back seat then
the floor in back thashing out
very violently with his legs;
thats how I shot him in the
knee. I did not leave the cene
of the killing with squealing
tires + raceing engine as described
in the Vallejo paper. I drove away
quite slowly so as not to draw
attention to my car.*

*The man who told the police
that my care was brown was a
negro about 40-45 rather shabbly
dressed. I was at this phone
booth having some fun with the
Vallejo cops when he was walking
by. When I hung the phone up
the dam X@ thing began to
ring + that drew his attention
to me + my car.*

Last Christmass

*In that episode the police were
wondering as to how I could
shoot + hit my victoms in the
dark. They did not openly state
this, but implied this by saying
it was a well lit night + I could
see the silouets on the horizon.
BullShit that area is srouded*

by high hills + trees. What I did
was tape a small pencil flash
light to the barrel of my gun.
If you notice, in the center
of the beam of light if you aim
it at a wall or ceiling you will
see a black or darck spot in
the center of the circle of
light aprox 3 to 6 in. across.
When taped to a gun barrel,
the bullet will strike exactly
in the center of the black
dot in the light. All I had to do
was spray them as if it was
a water hose; there was no
need to use the gun sights.
I was not happy to see that I
did not get front page cover-
age.

NO ADDRESS

Figure 2.7: The Zodiac's August 4, 1969 *Examiner* letter.

Chief Stiltz continued to downplay the possibility that the author and the murderer were one and the same. In fact, the *Examiner* article of August 4, which documented the arrival of the new letter, characterized Stiltz as "... inclined to suspect the writer was just making use of details publicized at the time of the slaying.... " Furthermore, the image of the letter included a caption asserting "Police are not convinced writer is actual killer."²⁷ However, by Sunday, August 10, the joint edition of the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* conceded that the new letter "... supplied information not previously made public.... "²³

In the wake of the earlier Lake Herman Road killings, law enforcement had only a seemingly motiveless double homicide on which to build its investigation. By mid-August of 1969, those tasked with bringing the fugitive to justice were confronting three murders, one attempted murder, four letters sent to three newspapers, a bizarre cipher with a foreboding solution, and a perpetrator with not one, but two aliases: "the Cipher Killer", as dubbed by the media, and "the Zodiac": the man's preferred, self-assigned moniker.

To be sure, residents in and around Vallejo remained acutely aware of the happenings involving the Zodiac. Meanwhile, the rest of the Bay Area looked on with curiosity, but little real concern. The

involvement of those in San Francisco itself would change in dramatic fashion soon enough. But before that could happen, a bizarre, disturbing, and deadly chain of events was about to play out in an unbefittingly beautiful part of Napa County.

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Chapter 3

Gaining Momentum

When torrential water tosses boulders, it is because of its momentum.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, circa 500 BCE

3.1 Lake Berryessa

Pacific Union College is a small, Seventh-Day Adventist, liberal arts college nestled in the hills above Napa Valley. In 1968, students Cecelia Shepard and Bryan Hartnell found comfort in each other's company and developed a romantic relationship. But, as is often the case in the lives of the young, circumstances changed, situations evolved, and eventually the two drifted apart. By 1969, Cecelia had decided to finish her studies closer to her Southern California hometown of Loma Linda. To that end, she enrolled at the University of California – Riverside * and prepared to start classes in October.

As the start of the school year approached, Cecelia had one significant problem that remained unresolved—several of her belongings were still in a storage area at her old dormitory at Pacific Union College. From a practical perspective, she had little choice but to venture northward one more time to retrieve her possessions.

On Saturday, September 27, 1969, Cecelia, now 22, was back on the campus of Pacific Union College. Undoubtedly as a matter of convenience, Cecelia chose to eat lunch in the campus cafeteria, where she happened upon Bryan Hartnell, now age 20, and another friend named Judy. Cecelia and Bryan quickly caught up with each other and as lunch ended, they found themselves not wanting to part company. After some discussion, Cecelia, Judy, and Bryan decided to head to the nearby town of St. Helena where they went to a rummage sale.

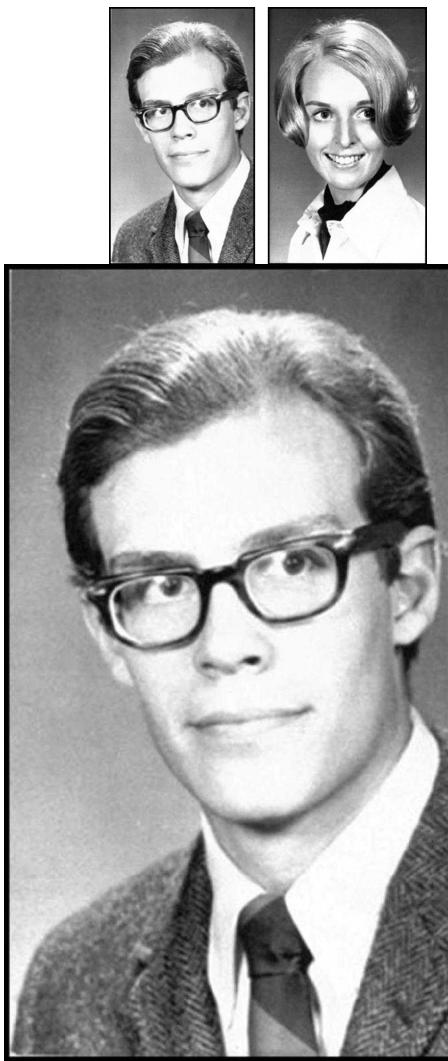


Figure 3.1: Bryan Hartnell and Cecelia Shepard. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

By 2:00 p.m., Cecelia and Bryan had decided to spend the rest of the afternoon together, so they parted ways with Judy. Originally, the plan had been to go to San Francisco, but instead, they settled on visiting nearby Lake Berryessa.

For most of its existence, Berryessa was not a lake, but rather a vast valley renowned for the fertility of its soil. However, in the middle of the twentieth century, those charged with providing for the common welfare of Northern Californians were facing a major challenge: a century of population growth had placed an unsustainable strain on the existing water-delivery infrastructure. The situation presented a large-scale problem that necessitated an equally

large-scale solution.

In September 1953, after years of research, negotiation, and planning, California Governor Earl Warren and others broke ground on the Solano Project—an undertaking whereby the United States Bureau of Reclamation in cooperation with state and local authorities would transform the Berryessa Valley into a reservoir. Over the next four years, a massive operation moved forward, despite the impassioned, but ultimately futile, objections of many local residents. In the interest of the greater good, California forced the inhabitants of Monticello, the valley's only town, to relocate. Soon after, an army of laborers destroyed all the valley's buildings, cut every tree to within six inches of the ground, and even moved a cemetery. Meanwhile, construction crews erected a dam at the narrow point of the valley's canyon, along its southeastern edge. It would take Mother Nature six more years to completely finish her part: filling the reservoir. Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s Lake Berryessa was not only serving the vital water-infrastructure function for which it had been constructed, but it also had become a popular recreational destination. Of course, it was this latter characteristic of the reservoir that compelled Bryan and Cecelia to venture to the lake on that late-September afternoon.

Bryan had been to the lake previously and remembered a spot on the western shore that he'd found especially beautiful. After fruitlessly searching for the site, he and Cecelia decided simply to choose a location at random. Bryan parked his sporty Volkswagen Karmann Ghia on Knoxville Road, and the two started the hike down to the shoreline.

After the pair walked out to the end of a peninsula, Bryan spread out a blanket at the water's edge. The two relaxed and began to reminisce about old times while enjoying the natural beauty of their surroundings.

A while later, Bryan heard some rustling nearby. He was lying on his back, while Cecelia was on her stomach facing him. Bryan was not wearing his glasses and Cecelia had a better vantage point, so he asked her what was making the noise. Cecelia remarked that it was a man, who appeared to be watching them. She then said that he'd stepped behind a tree. Bryan suggested that he may be "taking a leak." Soon after, the man reemerged from behind the tree, surprisingly close to the couple. Cecelia squeezed Bryan's arm and exclaimed: "Oh my god! He's got a gun!"

While behind the tree, the man had donned a bizarre disguise—a police sketch of the outfit is shown in Figure 3.2. His head was completely covered with an executioner-style hood. The top of the hood looked flat and had four corners, similar to the way a paper

grocery bag would look if it were turned upside down. The cloth of the hood extended down nearly to the man's waist in both the front and back. Neatly embroidered on the chest area was a concentric cross and circle, with the circle being about three inches in diameter. Although not recognized by Bryan or Cecelia at the time, this symbol, of course, was the Zodiac symbol. The eye openings of the hood were covered by clip-on sunglasses, which obstructed their view of the assailant's eyes.

Though brandishing a gun and cloaked in a terrifying disguise, the menacing individual started by reassuring the young couple that they need not be afraid. He explained—what we now know to be a ruse—that he was an escaped convict from Deer Lodge Prison in Montana. He said he was en route to Mexico, and consequently, needed money and Bryan's vehicle.





Figure 3.2: A police sketch of the Zodiac in his Lake Berryessa outfit. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

During his undergraduate studies, Bryan had taken classes in sociology and psychology, so he tried to engage the gunman in conversation throughout the initial portion of the ordeal. Bryan offered to write the man a check or provide other types of assistance. The killer ignored these suggestions.

In terms of cash, Bryan had all of 75 cents. After explaining the situation, he complied with the assailant's demands by throwing his wallet and car keys toward the stranger.

At this point, the gunman said, "I'm going to have to tie you up." He then produced some precut lengths of plastic clothesline from his back pocket. He tossed some of the rope to Cecelia and ordered her to tie Bryan's hands behind his back. She nervously followed the instructions but tied the knots rather loosely. Then, the man tied Cecelia's hands extremely tightly and retied Bryan's in a similar fashion.

With his victims partially immobilized, the killer told Bryan to lie down on his stomach so he could tie his feet. The young man protested aggressively and repeatedly, arguing that he and Cecelia might not be found for a long time and that the area gets very cold at night. After running out of patience, the man put the gun to Bryan's head and exclaimed: "I told you to get down!" Feeling as if he had no other choice, Bryan complied.

The killer proceeded to hog-tie Bryan, binding his ankles and then tying his ankles to his hands—again very tightly. With Bryan subdued, the man returned his attention to Cecelia, whom he also hog-tied. While the assailant restrained Cecelia, Bryan noticed that the man's hands were shaking, so he asked: "Are you nervous?" The stranger calmly laughed and replied: "Yes, I guess so." Unbeknownst to Bryan, the nervousness was an ominous sign of what was to come.

Bryan had once read an article that claimed many armed criminals explicitly did not load their weapons when committing crimes. This way, the criminals supposedly avoided the possibility of inadvertently killing or injuring somebody during the commission of their crimes. Sensing that he and Cecelia were nearing the end of their involvement with the apparent thief—that he would soon take Bryan's wallet and keys and leave—Bryan asked the assailant whether the gun was even loaded. The Zodiac was happy to address the inquiry. He removed the gun from its holster and pulled out the clip from the butt of the semiautomatic weapon, revealing that the gun was, indeed, loaded.

The exact details of what happened next are a point of dispute. During police interviews after the attack, Bryan admitted that he was uncertain whether he saw the killer draw a knife or whether he simply felt the assailant plunge the weapon into his back.¹ Further confusing the matter, Park Ranger William White, who attended to the victims

before the ambulance arrived, reported that Bryan told him the killer had said, “I’m going to have to stab you.” Supposedly, Bryan replied, “Stab me first. I’m chicken. I couldn’t stand to see her stabbed first.” In some versions of the dialogue, the “I’m chicken” statement is omitted, in others the Zodiac replies by saying “I’ll do just that.”²⁻⁴ Years later, when Bryan served as a consultant for the movie *Zodiac* (2007), his only request regarding the screenplay was that this particular dialogue be removed.⁵

What is not in dispute is that the killer proceeded to stab Bryan in the back six to eight times. Demonstrating a remarkable presence of mind and an impressive capacity for self-control, Bryan did not struggle with his attacker; instead, he feigned death. Believing that he had eliminated Bryan, the killer proceeded to stab Cecelia even more savagely. Unlike Bryan, Cecelia did put up a fight, and, in the process, the killer stabbed her at least ten times in the back, abdomen, and groin.⁶ Bryan recalled that the man entered a state of “frenzy” during the attack on Cecelia.⁷

Finally, believing he had fatally injured both victims, the assailant stood up and walked away without saying a word. Bryan’s wallet and the keys to his car remained untouched by the stranger—telltale signs of a ruse that no longer served its purpose.

Almost as soon as the man left, Bryan and Cecelia began talking with each other. Unsurprisingly, both were in a tremendous amount of pain. Nevertheless, the two began conceiving of ways to untie each other. Bryan maneuvered into a position where he was able to free one of Cecelia’s hands with his teeth. Unfortunately, Cecelia’s arms were too numb from the exceptionally tight bindings to be of much use.⁸

Seemingly at an impasse, Bryan and Cecelia changed their focus to attracting the attention of anybody within earshot. Several boats passed by, but none seemed to hear the couple’s desperate cries for help. Finally, a fishing boat happened by and turned off its motor. The boat kept its distance, which seemed to indicate that whoever was aboard had taken notice of the situation. The vessel lingered for an agonizing fifteen minutes while Bryan and Cecelia continued to invest what little energy they could muster into pleading for help. Then, without warning or interaction, the boat restarted its engine and left, much to the despair of the victimized couple. But, what Bryan and Cecelia did not know is that the boat’s sole occupant, a man named Richard Fong, *had* seen them, concluded that something was seriously wrong, and went to get help.

Soon after the departure of the boat, Cecelia regained the use of her free arm. As a result, she managed to loosen one of Bryan’s knots which, in turn, enabled him to free both himself and Cecelia.

Operating on the belief that there was no help on the way, Bryan decided that he needed to get back to Knoxville Road, the lake's main thoroughfare, and find help. With that goal in mind, Bryan set out. A short time later, Park Ranger Dennis Land, responding to a radio broadcast of Fong's report, found Bryan. The young man had slowly progressed about 225 yards toward Knoxville Road.

Meanwhile, Fong, Park Ranger William White, and a local husband and wife returned to the scene of the crime via speedboat. They found Cecelia in excruciating pain. White immediately radioed for an ambulance and, in the meantime, the four began trying to help Cecelia as best they could. Soon after, Land arrived with Bryan.

Next on scene were officers from the Napa County Sheriff's Department, followed by an ambulance. Emergency personnel attended to Cecelia and Bryan, loaded them into the ambulance, and departed for Queen of the Valley Hospital. Unfortunately, the remoteness of the location meant that it had taken nearly forty-five minutes for the ambulance to arrive, and it took about the same amount of time to get to the hospital. By the time the ambulance reached its destination at 8:50 p.m., nearly two and a half hours had passed since the grisly attack. Bryan was still conscious when they arrived at the hospital; however, Cecelia had lapsed into a coma.

At 7:40 p.m., the killer stepped into a phone booth near a local car wash at the corner of Main and Clinton Streets in downtown Napa. He picked up the receiver, dialed the operator, and asked for the police department. When the operator asked the man for the phone number from which he was calling, he refused to provide it.

A young rookie officer named David Slaight was manning the police department switchboard. When the call came in, he answered in his standard manner: "Napa Police Department. Officer Slaight." The killer—whom Slaight described as possibly being in his early twenties—began to talk. "I'd like to report a murder, no, a double murder. They are two miles north of park headquarters. They were in a white Volkswagen Karmann Ghia." Believing the man was simply reporting the crime, Officer Slaight tried to get additional information from the caller. He asked, "Where are you now?" In response, the man said, in a quiet voice, "I'm the one that did it." Next, Officer Slaight heard the phone receiver being put down but not hung up. The background noise of passing traffic and fleeting voices remained audible.⁹

Immediately, Slaight notified the sheriff's department of the call and asked the operator to initiate a trace. The operator complied and also communicated what little information she had about the call—it had originated at a pay phone with a 255 prefix, a prefix that served a subset of the Napa area.

Pat Stanley was the news director at a local radio station in Napa. On this particular Saturday evening, he was in the station's newsroom listening to a police scanner. He had been following the developments involving the stabbings closely since the earliest reports. When news of the phone call came over the airwaves, Stanley saw an opportunity to help. In his own words:

After a brief stop at the Sheriff's Department, I drove north on Main Street. Driving past a car wash and the historic Sam Key Laundry Building, I spotted a pay phone but thought the call must have come from closer to the lake, nearly thirty miles away. At the last second, though, I swerved my car toward the phone booth and was shocked to find the receiver off the hook. Could this be the phone, I wondered?¹⁰

Indeed, it was. The killer had called the Napa Police Department from a location less than half a mile away. A short while later, Detective Sergeant Hal Snook began processing the phone booth for physical evidence. Thirty-five latent prints were lifted, including one especially promising palm print. Some prints were so fresh that "heavy beads of moisture remained on the [impressions] photographed approximately three hours after..." Snook arrived.¹¹

Back at the lake, deputies from the Napa County Sheriff's Department turned their attention to the crime scene. Investigators were extremely displeased to learn that the site of the attack itself had been compromised when a well-meaning park ranger moved all the physical evidence—the couple's possessions, the bloodstained ropes, etc.—to park headquarters. Fortunately, the integrity of the rest of the crime scene had been well maintained.

The most notable and bizarre clue was a message that the killer himself had scrawled on the passenger's-side door of Bryan's white Karmann Ghia. Using a black felt-tip pen, the assailant wrote the following:

*Vallejo
12-20-68
7-4-69
Sept 27-69 – 6:30
by knife*

Law enforcement disclosed the existence of the message but initially withheld its contents. Within three days of the crime, however, the message, except for the final line, was made public. Captain Donald Townsend explained, "We are holding back part of the

note because, when and if he writes, he can say what else was written there.... ”¹² The phrase “by knife” remained undisclosed in the Bay Area, not appearing in any newspaper articles from the general time frame. However, at least two staff writers for newspapers outside the Bay Area, one in New York and the other in Ohio, managed to obtain the phrase for stories they respectively wrote in November and December 1969.^{13,14} Just over a year later, Napa County Sheriff’s Detective Ken Narlow—the lead investigator for the Lake Berryessa attack—explicitly disclosed the phrase to a *Detroit Free Press* reporter, commenting: “We haven’t shown this to anyone. You always try to save something, you know, but it’s gone beyond that now.”¹⁵

It wasn’t until daybreak on Sunday, September 28, that investigators came to understand the totality of the evidence at the scene. Many distinctive, high-quality footprints marked a clear path that the killer had taken from Knoxville Road down to the site of the attack and back. The footprints clearly led right to the spot where the man had written the message on Bryan’s car door. Investigators took multiple photographs and made plaster casts of the impressions.





Figure 3.3: A photo of Bryan Hartnell's Volkswagen Karmann Ghia car door taken shortly after the attack. The final line of the Zodiac's writing, which reads "by knife," has been concealed to prevent disclosure. Credit: Napa County Sheriff's Office.

Additionally, tire tracks at the scene seemed to suggest that the killer had parked his car right behind Bryan's. Again, investigators took photographs and made plaster casts of the tracks. Interestingly,

the tracks revealed that the front two tires on the killer's car did not match each other.

Late in the day on Sunday, the dean of Pacific Union College called the Napa County Sheriff's Office and reported that three young women—students at PUC—potentially had some valuable information. The next day, the three young coeds went to the sheriff's department, and officers interviewed each of them separately.¹⁶ All three told essentially the same story.

About three hours prior to the attack, the young women had gone to Lake Berryessa to sunbathe. They chose a spot on the western shore of the lake in the same general vicinity of the attack but not exactly the same turnout. As they were getting out of their vehicle, a man pulled into the lot and parked nearby. He was driving a newer, light blue Chevrolet with California license plates. The women proceeded down to the shoreline and began to enjoy the warmth of the day. About thirty minutes later, the women were surprised to notice the same man about fifty feet away. The stranger was clearly watching the women; however, every time one of them looked up, the man would look away.

After thirty minutes or so, the man came closer and passed within twenty feet of the women before leaving the area. By the time the women returned to their car at 4:30 p.m., the man had left. The women gave similar descriptions of the unidentified male. He was approximately 30 years old, six feet tall, 200–225 pounds, “stocky,” with dark hair parted on the left side. In terms of clothing, he was wearing dark pants and a short-sleeve “sweater shirt.” Interestingly, two of the women described the man as “rather nice looking,” while the third said he was “fairly nice looking.”¹⁶ An artist worked with the young women to construct a composite of the man.¹⁷

Sadly, Cecelia Shepard did not survive the ordeal. At 3:45 p.m. on Monday, she died with her family by her side. Three days later, a friend of Cecelia's father's performed the funeral service at the Pacific Union College Church. Unbeknownst to the grieving attendees, detectives photographed everyone entering and leaving the funeral on the chance that the killer would attend. A short time later, Cecelia was laid to rest in nearby St. Helena.¹⁸

Bryan later speculated that Cecelia probably would have survived if she had received medical attention sooner. Given how articulate she was immediately after the attack and how she had lapsed into a coma by the time she arrived at the hospital, he was likely correct.

One of the areas where investigators initially focused was trying to identify the kind of shoe that could have made the impressions left by the killer. A detective took one of the plaster casts of the shoe print to a dozen shoe stores in the Napa area.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the endeavor

yielded little usable information. The real break in identifying the footwear came from a retired air force master sergeant who owned a similar pair of shoes.²⁰ He told investigators that many people in the US Air Force were issued this type of shoes. Additionally, much of the civilian personnel employed on air force bases also wore the shoes, which were known as “wing-walkers” because their antistatic soles were specifically designed to enable wearers of the shoes to walk on the wings of airplanes. With the help of personnel from nearby Travis Air Force Base, investigators learned that the exact size of the shoe impression was 10 1 / 2. Furthermore, the shoes were not only sold to air force personnel, they were routinely sold to civilians as surplus.

Reports of the attack on Cecelia and Bryan rippled through the communities in and around Napa, engendering a predictable reaction of shock and disbelief. Not only did the crime embody the all-too-familiar characteristic of senseless tragedy, but this time there was an undeniable component of bizarre ritual. In addition to continuing his murderous rampage, the killer was becoming more audacious, more inexplicable, and frankly, more terrifying.

The attack at Lake Berryessa represented a significant turning point in the evolution of the serial killer in that it was the first time he had struck since publicly establishing his persona. Though his note on the side of Bryan Hartnell’s car offered little in terms of identity-verifying details, law enforcement immediately and without hesitation concluded the murder was indeed the work of the so-called Cipher Killer. In fact, investigators speculated “that the killer may now follow the patterns set up in the last Vallejo murder when the deranged man sent notes to Vallejo and San Francisco papers in the form of cryptograms,” and that “local media may be contacted by the crazed man.”²¹ As fate would have it, the prediction would not be validated by the killer’s actions, at least not exactly as predicted.

On October 2, the *Examiner* published a small update about the investigation on page 8. The article concluded with a short quote from Napa County Sheriff’s Captain Don Townsend: “Unless we capture this man, he will kill again.”²² Much to the dismay of nearly everyone, Townsend’s words would prove prophetic.

3.2 Presidio Heights

While friends and family were saying good-bye to Cecelia Shepard, a twenty-nine-year-old San Francisco resident named Paul Stine was going about the normal routines of his life. As a graduate student at San Francisco State College, Paul was working toward a PhD in English. According to his brother, Joe, Paul was on schedule to fulfill the requirements of the degree by January 1970. Considering the time

and effort required to earn the degree, Paul must have been looking forward to the future with great anticipation. Sadly, Paul would not live to see that future as he was soon to be the next victim of a madman's murderous machinations.

The ongoing expenses that Paul incurred while attending San Francisco State College were significant. Joe helped Paul out with some of the expenses, but to cover the remaining costs, Paul worked as a taxicab driver for the Yellow Cab Taxi Company. Presumably because of his class schedule, he chose to drive the night shift, working from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On Saturday, October 11—just two weeks after the Lake Berryessa attack—Paul reported to the Yellow Cab Company for another night's work. By 9:30 p.m., he had completed his first fare of the evening and had just received notification from dispatch about another. Apparently en route to the location he'd received from dispatch, Paul picked up his second fare of the night—a lone man who hailed the taxicab driver at the intersection of Mason and Geary Streets. The man requested a destination of Washington and Maple, an intersection in the affluent Presidio Heights neighborhood. Paul recorded the entry in his logbook, started the meter, and embarked on the three-mile drive.

Upon arriving at the destination, the lone passenger—for reasons unknown—instructed Paul to drive one block farther to the corner of Washington and Cherry Streets. Once stopped, the man drew a 9 mm weapon, put the gun to Paul's head just behind his right ear, and fired a single shot. With Paul fatally injured, the man moved to the front passenger seat.

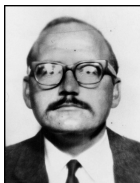




Figure 3.4: Paul Stine near the time of his death. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

No witnesses saw or heard the shot that claimed Paul Stine's life. Nor did anyone observe the killer move from the back seat to the front. But, by the time the man was settled in the front seat, three youths—ages sixteen, twelve, and eight—on the third floor of the residence across the street began to take notice of the situation. Although they did not realize that Paul was fatally wounded, they did observe the assailant struggling with Paul's body and rifling through his pockets. Immediately, one of the three phoned the police.

The older two witnesses descended to the first floor of the house in order to watch the developing situation from a better vantage point. The man was wiping down the inside of the cab with some type of cloth. Next, he moved Stine's body into an upright position behind the steering wheel, exited the taxicab, closed the passenger door, and wiped down the exterior of the door. He then walked around the back of the cab to the driver's side. The assailant opened the driver's door, again repositioned Stine's body—which had slumped over—closed the door, and again wiped down an exterior section of the vehicle. Finally,

apparently satisfied with the state of the cab, the killer left the scene by casually walking north on Cherry Street.²³

Jackson Street runs parallel to Washington. When the killer reached the intersection of Cherry and Jackson, he crossed to the north side of the street, turned right, and continued east on Jackson.

In a particularly poignant episode of misfortune, the youth who called the police and the dispatcher with whom she spoke miscommunicated. While the exact details of the flawed conversation are uncertain, the consequence is one of the most significant missed opportunities in the entirety of the case. Specifically, the initial radio broadcasts incorrectly advised officers to be on the lookout for an NMA—Negro Male Adult which was 1960s law enforcement parlance for a black man. As fate would have it, Officer Donald Fouke and his temporary partner for the evening, rookie Officer Eric Zelms, drove west on Jackson and observed a man who undoubtedly was the Zodiac. However, since the officers were looking for a black man and the individual they observed was a white male, they concluded that he was not the suspect and moved on.

After Officers Fouke and Zelms had driven off, the killer continued on Jackson and turned north into the Presidio by way of the Julius Kahn Playground. The Presidio was a then-active army post that embodied nearly 1,500 acres, much of which was wooded or covered in dense brush. Witnesses later confirmed seeing the man run into the area of the playground.²⁴

Back at the scene of the crime, Officers Armond Pelessetti and Frank Peda were the first members of the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) to arrive. They found two of the young witnesses approaching the cab. After ushering them to a safer location, Officer Pelessetti began to question the two about what they had seen. They told him that the suspect had just left on foot, heading north on Cherry. Furthermore, it was during this conversation that Officer Pelessetti realized that the first description of the suspect had been incorrect. He quickly contacted dispatch and corrected the description to a white male adult. Dispatch relayed the update.

Once dispatchers corrected the description of the assailant, Fouke and Zelms realized that they'd likely seen the real killer walking down Jackson Street. Correctly surmising that he was likely headed to the Presidio, the partners circled back around to see if they could find him. Unfortunately, it was too late.

At the crime scene, Officer Pelessetti peered into the taxicab and observed Paul Stine slumped across the front seat of the vehicle with his head resting on the passenger floorboard. Because of the state of the body and the amount of blood in the cab, the officer concluded that Stine was already dead. He requested an ambulance and

additional units to aid in the search for the suspect.

When the ambulance arrived, emergency personnel pronounced Paul Stine dead at the scene—the time was 10:10 p.m. Soon after, San Francisco Homicide Inspectors William Armstrong and David Toschi arrived on the scene. As the lead detectives in the killer's principal city of operation, these two men would soon become the individuals most associated with the search for the Zodiac—a notable distinction given that the manhunt would eventually span a multitude of agencies and involve countless members of law enforcement.

What ensued was a massive, collaborative search of the Presidio areas in and around Julius Kahn Playground. Multiple elements of federal and local government participated. Fire personnel provided a ladder truck equipped with a spotlight to light up the forested expanse. All seven units of the San Francisco canine force were pressed into action. SFPD officers apprised Military Police Headquarters at the Presidio of the situation who, in turn, provided military personnel to participate in the manhunt. The impressive undertaking continued well into the wee hours of the following morning. In the end, the search failed to achieve its goal, although it had not been for a lack of effort.²⁵

Further analysis of Paul Stine's taxicab revealed that someone, presumably the killer, had left a pair of men's black leather gloves on the back seat. Surprisingly, the gloves were size seven, commonly considered a small size. Additional evidence included the 9 mm shell casing from the bullet that ended Stine's life as well as thirty fingerprints, including one that belonged to Stine and another that included traces of blood and, therefore, was almost certainly left by the killer himself.²⁶ Conspicuously missing from the cab were Paul Stine's wallet and the ignition key to the vehicle. Also missing, although apparently unnoticed at the time, was a section from the back of Paul Stine's shirt. The killer had neatly torn off a piece of the victim's clothing.

To be sure, Paul Stine's murder was gruesome. But it was an unfortunate fact of life that taxicab drivers were sometimes the victims of armed robberies. Without evidence to suggest otherwise, police operated under the initial belief that Stine's death was the result of a robbery gone bad. In particular, the Zodiac had failed to leave any evidence at the scene of the crime that suggested his involvement—as he had done at Lake Berryessa. Nor did he make a taunting telephone call to police in the hours after the murder—as had been the case for both Blue Rock Springs and Lake Berryessa. In fact, the only clue that suggested this was anything more than just a random burglary—the torn shirt—seemed to go unappreciated, if not unnoticed.

The next morning the *Chronicle* ran a short story at the bottom of the front page recounting the essential facts of Paul's unfortunate demise under the headline "Cabbie Slain in Presidio Hts." The crime was described as "an apparent robbery attempt."²⁴

3.2.1 The Stine Letter— October 13, 1969

Sometime shortly after the murder of Paul Stine, the killer penned a single-page letter using what would become his standard blue felt-tip pen. He put the letter, along with a small piece of Stine's bloodstained shirt, into an envelope addressed to the *Chronicle*, and stamped it with twice the necessary postage. On Monday, at an unknown location in San Francisco, he dropped the grisly communiqué into a public mailbox. With this simple action, the killer set in motion a chain of events that would soon plunge the entire Bay Area into a state of near panic. Undoubtedly to the delight of the mystery madman, the story was about to receive national attention. Never before, and never again, would the fugitive's impact be so intense and so far-reaching. The killer was on the verge of achieving the pinnacle of his nefarious existence.

By Monday, San Francisco police had released a composite drawing, the first of two based on interviews with the witnesses in the Stine case. The composite accompanied a physical description of the suspect: white male, twenty-five to thirty years old, 5'8"–5'9" tall, and approximately 150 pounds. He was described as having reddish-brown hair styled in a crew cut. Finally, the assailant was said to have been wearing heavy-rimmed glasses and a navy-blue or black jacket. Both the composite and the description were published in the Tuesday edition of the *Examiner*.

While the public was reading about the new details of the fugitive in the *Examiner*, the *Chronicle* received the killer's next missive. An image of the letter is shown in Figure 3.5 and its contents are reproduced in Figure 3.6. The *Chronicle* immediately began cooperating with the SFPD by turning over the bloodstained swatch of Stine's shirt and the letter—albeit after photographing both. Police were quickly able to confirm that the swatch of cloth almost certainly was part, but not all, of the section that the murderer had torn from the victim's shirt.

This is the Zodiac speaking.
I am the murderer of the
taxi driver over by
Washington St & Maple St last
night, to prove this here is
a blood stained piece of his
shirt. I am the same man
who did in the people in the
north bay a-ee.

The S.F. Police could have caught
me last night if they had
searched the park properly,
instead of holding road races
with their motorcycles seeing who
could make the most noise. The
car drivers should have just
parked their cars & sat there
quietly waiting for me to come
out of cover.

School children make nice targ-
ets, I think I shall wipe out
a school bus some morning. Just
shoot out the front tire & then
pick off the kiddies as they come
bouncing out.




This is the Zodiac
I am the murderer o
taxi driver over
Washington St & Maple
night, to prove this
a blood stained piece
shirt. I am the same
who did in the people
north bay area.
The S.F. Police could
me last night if the
searched the park
instead of holding
with their motorcycles
could make the most
can drivers should be
parked & their cars &
quietly waiting for me
out of cover.
School children make
ets, I think I shall
a school bus some one
shoot out the front tire
pick off the kiddies
bouncing out. 

Figure 3.5: The Stine Letter. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

*This is the Zodiac speaking.
I am the murderer of the
taxi driver over by
Washington St + Maple St last
night, to prove this here is
a blood stained piece of his
shirt. I am the same man
who did in the people in the
north bay area.*

*The S.F. Police could have caught
me last night if they had
searched the park properly
instead of holding road races
with their motorcycles seeing who
could make the most noise. The
car drivers should have just
parked their cars + sat there
quietly waiting for me to come
out of cover.*

*school children make nice targ-
ets, I think I shall wipe out
a school bus some morning. Just
shoot out the front tire + then
pick off the kiddies as they come
bouncing out.*

Figure 3.6: The contents of the Stine Letter, postmarked October 13, 1969.

The SFPD and the staff of the *Chronicle* were well aware of the gravity of the situation given the threat embodied by the final two sentences of the letter. For Wednesday's edition, the editors decided to publish the news of the letter on the front page, above the fold. The article included a partial reproduction of the communiqué and the initial composite sketch released by the SFPD. However, notably missing from both the reproduction and the article was any mention of the killer's threat to harm schoolchildren. Law enforcement and the *Chronicle* had decided to omit the threat, if for no other reason than to buy some time to figure out how to broach the delicate subject.

On Thursday, October 16, Chief of Inspectors Martin Lee was paraphrased as saying that forensic testing of the cloth and its

bloodstains had conclusively linked the swatch to Paul Stine. Furthermore, handwriting analysis had shown “no dissimilarities” between the Stine Letter and the earlier Zodiac missives. Any attempt to suggest that the killer was not who he said he was—as had happened with the Vallejo murders—would have been pointless. Unsurprisingly, SFPD made no such suggestion.

More importantly, on that same day, the SFPD had concluded that it could no longer conceal the threat made against Bay Area schoolchildren. Given the circumstances, the SFPD’s obligation to public safety required that they disclose the threat. Hence, in a cooperative effort involving all levels of state and local government, the SFPD acknowledged the existence of the final two sentences of the Stine Letter.

Martin Lee issued an all-points bulletin with specific instructions for school bus drivers to follow in the event of an emergency.

*If a tire is punctured or shots are heard, keep the bus in motion at all costs. Instruct passengers to lie on the floor. Attract as much attention as possible by sounding the horn, flashing lights and erratic driving, if necessary.*²⁷

Moreover, California Attorney General Thomas Lynch became actively involved, coordinating actions across five Bay Area counties. He reassured the public that the relevant law enforcement agencies were taking all available precautions. While he conceded the obvious—that no one could make any guarantees about what would or would not happen—he also pointed out “the odds are that no tragedy will occur.” In this context, he urged the public not to become “hysterical.”²⁷

The magnitude of law enforcement’s initial response to this threat is difficult to overstate. In Napa County, the county in which the Zodiac had murdered Cecelia Shepard and had attempted to murder Bryan Hartnell, many bus routes included roads that were both rural and isolated. This combination of recent victimization and explicit vulnerability made the impact of the killer’s threat arguably more acute in Napa County than it was in San Francisco. The county had sixty-four school buses that traveled a combined distance of 4,000 miles per day, in pursuit of delivering roughly 10,000 students to and from the district’s twenty-eight schools. In the time frame immediately following the SFPD’s public disclosure of the threat, more than seventy units from local law enforcement agencies and the California Highway Patrol provided armed escorts to the entire fleet of buses. Even local aircraft helped monitor the transit of the county’s schoolchildren. Additionally, every bus driver was accompanied by a volunteer whose job was to keep an eye out for anything unusual and

take over driving in the event that something should happen to the driver.²⁸

Also of note, an all-points bulletin (APB) released by the SFPD included an amended description of the suspect. Whereas the fugitive had originally been described as twenty-five to thirty years old, 150 pounds with reddish-brown hair; he was now described as about forty years of age, “heavy built,” and having brown hair with a “possible reddish tint.”

On the following Monday, October 20, twenty-seven detectives representing seven law enforcement agencies met in San Francisco to share and review information regarding the elusive serial murderer. Detectives from each jurisdiction in which the Zodiac had committed a crime presented the facts of their respective cases. Martin Lee described the informal conference as fruitful, explaining: “We now have what we believe to be a better picture of the suspect.”²⁹

At the same time, the SFPD released an amended composite, shown in Figure 3.7, to go along with the updated description. The revised composite included both the original sketch of the suspect and a new, updated version that police had modified based on additional input from the young witnesses who had observed the fugitive shortly after Stine’s murder.

WANTED

SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT

NO. 90-69

WANTED FOR MURDER

OCTOBER 18, 1969



ORIGINAL DRAWING



AMENDED DRAWING

Supplementing our Bulletin 87-69 of October 13, 1969. Additional information has developed the above amended drawing of murder suspect known as "ZODIAC".

WMA, 35-45 Years, approximately 5'8", Heavy Build, Short Brown Hair, possibly with Red Tint, Wears Glasses. Armed with 9 MM Automatic.

Available for comparison: Slugs, Casings, Latents, Handwriting.

ANY INFORMATION:

Inspectors Armstrong & Toschi
Homicide Detail
CASE NO. 696314

THOMAS J. CAHILL
CHIEF OF POLICE

WANTED

SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT

NO. 90-69

WANTED FOR MURDER



ORIGINAL DRAWING

Supplementing our Bulletin 87-69 of October 13, 1969, developed the above amended drawing of murder suspect

WMA, 35-45 Years, approximately 5'8", Heavy Build, Short Red Tint, Wears Glasses. Armed with 9 mm Automatic.

Available for comparison: Slugs, Casings, Latents, Hair

ANY INFORMATION:

Inspectors Armstrong & Toschi
Homicide Detail
CASE NO. 696314

Figure 3.7: The amended "wanted" poster of the Zodiac showing both the

3.2.2 A Fraternal Challenge

From a human-interest perspective, one of the intriguing stories during this time frame was an article published by the *Examiner* wherein Paul Stine's older brother, Joe, challenged the Zodiac to come find him. A Korean War veteran with a 10 percent disability rating, Joe asserted, "I'm still tough enough to handle Zodiac."³⁰ He then proceeded to give a thorough accounting of his daily work routine, including the address of the service station where he was employed as an auto mechanic, the location where he ate lunch, and the various times of his comings and goings. The too-easily-forgotten emotional devastation left in the wake of the killer's actions is almost palpable in Joe's explanation for the challenge: "I was very close to Paul.... Now I want a chance at his killer." Although his place of employment must have been at least a little apprehensive about the prospect of Joe trying to goad California's—if not the nation's—most wanted serial killer into coming to find him at work, there's no evidence that the Zodiac ever reacted to the challenge.

3.3 The Sam Episode

Sometimes, news stories play out in a predictable, measured manner. Information becomes incrementally available and story arcs evolve in a logical progression. This was not one of those times. The events that fate next had in store for the case of the Zodiac were, plainly and simply, bizarre.

The unusual chain of events was set in motion when a person claiming to be the Zodiac made two separate telephone calls to the Oakland Police Department at approximately 11 p.m. on Tuesday, October 21. The caller told the officer manning the switchboard that he wanted police to arrange for famed defense attorney F. Lee Bailey—the prominent lawyer who had orchestrated Sam Sheppard's (and later O. J. Simpson's) eventual acquittal—to appear on a popular San Francisco morning television program called *A.M. San Francisco*, which was hosted by Jim Dunbar. If police were unable to arrange for F. Lee Bailey to appear, the caller would settle for well-known San Francisco defense attorney Melvin Belli. The man went on to say that once the arrangements had been made, he would call into the show and discuss the possibility of his surrender.³¹

The Oakland Police Department engaged with the SFPD who, in turn, tried to comply with the wishes of the man claiming to be the

Zodiac. Although they could not arrange for F. Lee Bailey to appear, they were successful in contacting Melvin Belli, who readily agreed.

A.M. San Francisco was a local call-in morning show that normally aired from 6:25 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. on Channel 7, KGO-TV. On this particular Wednesday morning, much of San Francisco tuned in to find Jim Dunbar joined by Melvin Belli. Dunbar explained the situation, and, unlike other mornings, he urged his audience *not* to call the show so the lines would remain open and the Zodiac would be able to get through easily, if and when he called.

For the better part of a tense hour, time ticked by without yielding the satisfaction of the anticipated phone call. Dunbar and Belli handled the awkward situation well. The two men who each made an impressive living through the use of spoken-word communication, passed the time in conversation. Finally, after about fifty minutes, the audience was given its first audible glimpse of the man claiming to be the Zodiac. As the program returned from a commercial break, Belli could be heard saying “Did you hear me,” to which a disembodied voice replied “Yes, I did” before hanging up.

The voice, described as “boyish” by some, seemed an improbable match for the cold-blooded murderer who had been terrorizing the Bay Area. However, the stakes were too high to let such preconceived expectations sabotage an opportunity to secure the surrender of the terroristic serial murderer. Belli moved forward operating on the assumption that the man was who he said he was.

Within a few minutes, the man called back. What followed was a disjointed conversation that spanned a total of fifteen phone calls. Belli and Dunbar repeatedly gave their assurances that the phone calls were not being traced, but those assurances did little to satisfy the paranoia of the man on the other end of the line who repeatedly hung up and called back.

Early on, Belli pressed the man claiming to be the Zodiac to provide an alternate, less ominous, name. The caller cooperated and asked to be called “Sam.”

During the rambling conversation, Sam claimed to have headaches and further suggested that his urges to kill resulted from these headaches. Although no direct references to the Zodiac crimes were made, Sam mentioned having previously killed “a kid” and having desires to kill.

Belli and Dunbar tried repeatedly to get Sam to identify the exact police department that the previous night’s caller had contacted to verify that, at least, he was the man for whom the arrangements had been made. Sam would not, or could not, provide the answer.

At multiple points, Sam tried to convince Belli to meet him atop the roof of the famed Fairmont Hotel—which, coincidentally, was

near the location where the Zodiac had hailed Paul Stine's cab. Eventually, off the air, Belli and Sam agreed to meet at 10:30 a.m. at an alternate location: St. Vincent de Paul's Thrift Shop.

The rendezvous time came and went. Belli was there; Sam was not. The popular defense attorney waited until 11:15 a.m. before abandoning hope. The sentiment shared by many was summed up nicely in the *Chronicle*: "Sam, to the surprise of possibly no one, never appeared."³²

Although hopes of the Zodiac surrendering expeditiously had been dashed, the morning's events still held the potential for yielding investigative value in that there was plenty of audiotape of the man claiming to be the Bay Area's most-wanted fugitive. The SFPD gathered together the three people who had previously heard the actual voice of the killer, namely: Nancy Slover (the Vallejo PD switchboard operator), David Slaight (the Napa PD officer who'd been manning the Napa switchboard when the Zodiac called), and Bryan Hartnell (the Lake Berryessa survivor). All three listened to the audiotape, with various clips being played multiple times. The conclusion was unanimous: the person who called the show was not the Zodiac. Not only were the audible characteristics of the voice wrong, but the manner in which the Zodiac spoke exhibited a confidence and maturity that Sam simply lacked. Initially, police asked the three ear witnesses not to disclose their conclusions. But, within days, law enforcement made the results of the audio review known to the public.

Four months later, SFPD detectives determined that a Napa Mental Hospital patient, Eric Weil, was responsible for placing numerous telephone calls to Melvin Belli's residence. They further concluded that Weil had been the man who called *A.M. San Francisco* claiming to be the Zodiac. What had started out as a valuable opportunity to bring a menacing fugitive to justice turned into little more than the disturbed ramblings of a troubled mind that, quite effectively, wasted the time and effort of many professionals.

But buried in the debacle that was the Sam episode is a curiosity. The Oakland police officer who was manning the switchboard when the Zodiac supposedly called, reported that the voice from the television show was not the voice of the man with whom he had spoken. Furthermore, sources at the Oakland Police Department disclosed to the *Examiner* that "the caller revealed knowledge about one or more of the five murders charged to 'Zodiac' that had never been made public."³¹ Strangely, an "official" from the same department told the *Chronicle* precisely the opposite.³³ Regardless of the fiasco that ensued, there is a realistic possibility that the Zodiac was indeed the man who called the Oakland Police Department.

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Chapter 4

Transforming

A thought, even a possibility, can transform us.

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher, 1844–
1900

Before the arrival of the Stine Letter, the Zodiac represented an abstract threat to the residents of San Francisco. He was operating within the Bay Area, but people living in the City by the Bay had little cause for concern because it seemed that the murderer preyed on couples north of the city. Romantically involved young adults who frequented secluded spots in the North Bay Area were right to be worried. But, people going about their daily lives in San Francisco itself had little to fear—or so it seemed.

The death of Paul Stine changed all that, profoundly and irrevocably. Suddenly, the curious and consistent actions of a sufficiently distant killer were much less predictable and uncomfortably close. What had been trysting couples was now an individual man doing nothing more than earning a living. What had been a secluded two-lane road in Vallejo changed into a heavily populated, albeit quiet, upscale neighborhood in their beloved city. What had been the troubled ramblings of a madman who seemed destined for certain apprehension continued in defiance of many peoples' expectations. Moreover, the cold and calculated threat to intentionally harm children—the community's most vulnerable and innocent members—further reinforced the notion that this killer was not bound by societal norms and therefore was capable of anything.

The rapid succession of events that happened in the wake of Paul Stine's death left residents of the Bay Area saturated with and traumatized by the Zodiac. From the apparent robbery-gone-bad murder of Stine, to the revelation that the crime was committed by the Zodiac, to the release of the composite drawings of the fugitive, to the threat against schoolchildren, to the fiasco of the Sam episode, to the poignant challenge thrown down by Paul Stine's older brother, the public had endured a veritable onslaught of Zodiac-related information.

In a short two weeks, media coverage of the murderer went from occasional to total inundation. Newspapers included stories about the fugitive almost daily and often on the front page. Local news shows

devoted substantial airtime to the latest developments. Even national news broadcasts reviewed various happenings in the case. If, as many people believe, the murderer hoped to achieve a significant degree of infamy and notoriety, he must have been extremely satisfied with the extent of media attention from this time frame. However, as the near future would reveal, the killer was expressly *dissatisfied* with certain other aspects of the coverage.

Relatedly, the constant media presence of the story generated a deluge of leads from the public. Under normal investigative circumstances, such information is often the key to solving a case. In this particular instance, however, few of the tips resulted in information that substantively moved the investigation forward. What the tips did do, ironically, was create a massive amount of work for law enforcement which, in turn, detracted from their ability to perform their job effectively—both as it related to the Zodiac case and otherwise. In the words of one police chief, “... at times we are getting so bogged down checking out Zodiac leads that we can’t get on other cases as fast as we should.”¹

With the benefit of hindsight, we can look back on the weeks following the murder of Paul Stine and see that it was the pinnacle of the killer’s impact. Despite his best efforts, never again would the narcissistic murderer command such extreme levels of attention. He had, in point of fact, begun a journey toward diminished influence and a strange type of unresolved obscurity. But the path to that eventual destination would prove to be long, winding, and eventful.

4.1 The Dripping Pen Card— November 8, 1969

Predictably, the Zodiac could not stay quiet for long. He sent his next two communiqués at nearly the same time. The first—a greeting card accompanied with a new cipher—was mailed from somewhere in San Francisco and postmarked Saturday, November 8. The second correspondence—a rambling seven-page letter known as the “Bus Bomb Letter”—was also sent from San Francisco but postmarked the following day. Both were addressed to the “S.F. Chronicle” and labeled with the now-familiar phrase “Please Rush to Editor.” Both reached their destination on Monday. The Bus Bomb Letter contained an additional bloodstained piece of Paul Stine’s shirt.

The greeting card—which came to be known as the “Dripping Pen Card”—was a droll attempt at humor. The front of the card was a drawing of a wet fountain pen hung up to dry. The accompanying text read: “Sorry I haven’t written, but I just washed my pen...” On the inside, the card continued in writing that was intended to look as if it came from a nonfunctioning fountain pen: “and i can’t do a thing with

it!” To this, the killer added the handwritten contents shown in Figure 4.1.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
I though you would need a
good laugh before you
hear the bad news
you wont get the
news for a while yet
PS could you print
this new cipher
on your frunt page?
I get awfully lonely
when I am ignored,
So lonely I could
do my **Thing**!!!!!!*

*Des July Aug
Sept Oct = 7*

Figure 4.1: The handwritten contents of the Dripping Pen Letter, postmarked November 8, 1969. Mistakes are uncorrected.

The final word, “Thing,” was excessively overwritten and underlined six times. The killer signed the card with his usual Zodiac symbol, below which he added:

*Des July Aug
Sept Oct = 7*

These last two lines are the first instance of a practice that the killer would soon use to continually taunt law enforcement and the public: a running murder tally. In later letters, he would simplify the expression to just the murder count or score. In this initial occurrence, however, the construct included the murder count accompanied by a sequence of months (“Des” is a misspelled abbreviation of December), presumably indicating the months during which the murders were committed.

The contents of this taunt are puzzling insofar as the killer was claiming to have murdered seven people, two more than police had attributed to him. Furthermore, all the months listed corresponded to

known Zodiac attacks, except for one: August. Taken together, these facts seem to imply that the killer was claiming to have murdered two additional people in August 1969, or that he murdered one additional person in August and another in a month that had already been accounted for by one of the other known murders.

As it turns out, there was a high-profile double murder in San Jose on August 3, 1969. Two young women, Deborah Furlong and Kathy Snoozy—ages fourteen and fifteen respectively—were savagely murdered, each being stabbed more than a hundred times.² Not surprisingly, some suggested that the Zodiac was attempting to take credit for those as-of-then unsolved murders.

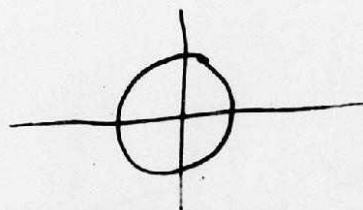
Regardless of whether the Zodiac intended to imply that he was responsible for the murders of Furlong and Snoozy, the investigators involved with the case found the suggestion unconvincing. San Jose Chief of Detectives Barton Collins, the man in charge of the investigation, flatly rejected the possibility: “I don’t think he’s connected with my case at all.”³ Collins went on to make the cogent point that the Zodiac’s Lake Berryessa attack happened after the Furlong and Snoozy homicides. Yet when the killer listed his previous murders on Bryan Hartnell’s car door, he made no mention of August 3, 1969, nor any other date in August for that matter.

The passage of time would prove Collins right about the Zodiac not being involved with the murder of the San Jose teenagers. It would take two more years and, sadly, the loss of an additional life, but in 1971, police arrested an eighteen year old named Karl Werner who later pleaded guilty to the murders of Furlong and Snoozy.^{2,4}

Back in the realm of the Zodiac investigation, detectives visited numerous stores throughout San Francisco in the hopes that a salesperson would remember having sold a copy of the greeting card that the killer had chosen for his recent communiqué. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their efforts were for naught.

The cipher that accompanied the correspondence was neatly printed in a grid-like fashion using the killer’s writing instrument of choice, a blue felt-tip pen. The author had constructed the cryptogram using twenty lines, with each line containing exactly seventeen symbols. In other words, the cipher had the same number of columns as the killer’s previous 408 cryptogram but contained four fewer rows. In total, the length of the cipher was 340 symbols, and hence, it’s often referred to as the “340 cipher” or simply the “340”; see Figure 4.2. Below the enciphered message, the killer signed off using his standard concentric cross and circle signature.

H E R > 9 J A V P X I O L T G O O
 N 9 + B O O D W Y . < K F O
 B X I O M + u z G W O L O H J
 S 9 9 A A J A V O 9 O + + R K O
 O A M + O L T O I O F P + P O X /
 9 A R A F J O - O C F > O D O
 O O + K O O I O U O X G V . O L I
 O G O J F T O O + O N Y O + O L A
 O < M + 8 + Z R O F B O Y A O O K
 - O J U V + A J + O 9 A < F B Y -
 U + R / O L E I D Y B 9 8 T M K O
 O < O J R J I O O T O M . + P B F
 O O A S Y O + N I O F B O O I A R
 J G F N A F O O O B . O V O L + +
 Y B X O O I O A C E > V U Z O - +
 I O . O O B K O O 9 A . F M O G O
 R O T + L O O C < + F J W B I O L
 + + O W C O W O P O S H T / O O 9
 I F X O W < A L B O Y O B O - C O
 > M D H N 9 K S O Z O A I K I +



H E R > 9 J A V P X I
 N 9 + B ϕ ■ O ■ D W Y
 B X I C M + u z G W ϕ
 S 9 9 Δ A J ▲ ▽ V O 9
 □ Δ M + ⊕ ⊥ τ O I ● F
 9 ▲ R A F J O - ■ O C
 ■ ● + K ∅ ■ I ● u C X
 ϕ G ● J 7 τ ■ O + □ N
 O < M + 8 + Z R ● F B
 - ⊕ J u v + A J + O 9
 u + R / ● ⊥ E I D Y B
 ● < C J R J I ■ ● T ●
 ⊕ O Δ S Y ■ + N I ● F
 J G F N A 7 ● ● ● B ·
 Y B X ● ■ I ● Δ C E >
 I C · O ⊕ B K ϕ O 9 A
 R C T + L ● ● C < + F
 + + ⊕ W C ⊕ W C P O S
 I F X O W < Δ ⊥ B □ Y
 > M D H N 9 X S ⊕ Z O

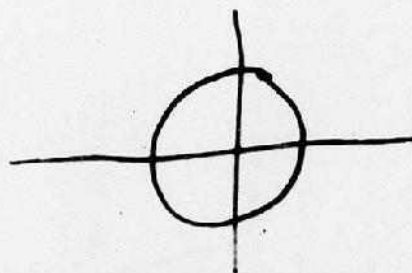


Figure 4.2: The Zodiac's 340 cipher sent along with the Dripping Pen Card.

The killer reused many of the 408's symbols when crafting the 340, but he also used several new symbols. One of the first exercises that people pursued was substituting the symbol assignments from the 408 into the 340. The staff at the *Examiner* tried this approach and published some of their results on Wednesday, November 12. Of course, the solution to the cipher would not reveal itself so easily and such attempts at decipherment yielded, in the words of the *Examiner* staff, "gibberish."⁵

Both the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner* published the 340 cipher in its entirety, alongside the news of its arrival. Motivated by the previous success of Donald and Bettye Harden, hundreds of would-be cipher solvers set out to tackle the killer's latest cryptographic challenge.⁶ At the same time, detectives from the SFPD forwarded copies of the latest cipher to the various law enforcement, military, and governmental agencies that possessed the requisite expertise for analyzing such enigmas. Perhaps understandably, officials were optimistic about the likelihood of a solution being found, expecting "it to be deciphered within a few days."⁷

As I write these words, five decades later, the cipher remains unsolved.*.

4.2 The Bus Bomb Letter— November 9, 1969

Although mailed nearly simultaneously, the Dripping Pen Card and the Bus Bomb Letter were remarkably different in terms of their content and tone. Whereas the greeting card had little substance—apart from the cryptogram and the humorous message provided by the card itself—the seven-page Bus Bomb Letter was long and rambling. Moreover, unlike previous letters from the killer where his tone had been noticeably matter-of-fact and somewhat detached, this letter exhibited a clear sense of palpable hostility—primarily directed at law enforcement.

The written contents of the Bus Bomb Letter are shown in Figures 4.3 and 4.4, spelling mistakes and all.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
up to the end of Oct I have
killed 7 people. I have grown
rather angry with the police
for their telling lies about me.*

So I shall change the way the
collecting of slaves. I shall
no longer announce to anyone.
when I comitt my murders,
they shall look like routine
robberies, killings of anger, +
a few fake accidents, etc.

The police shall never catch me,
because I have been too clever
for them.

1 I look like the description
passed out only when I do
my thing, the rest of the time
I look entirle different. I
shall not tell you what my
descise consists of when I kill

2 As of yet I have left no
fingerprints behind me contrary
to what the police say

in my killings I wear trans-
parent finger tip guards. All it
is is 2 coats of airplane cement
coated on my finger tips—quite
unnoticable + very efective.

3 my killing tools have been bought
en through the mail order out-
fits before the ban went into
effect. except one + it was
bought out of the state.

So as you see the police don't
have much to work on. If you
wonder why I was wipeing the
cab down I was leaving fake clews
for the police to run all over town
with, as one might say, I gave
the cops som bussy work to do to
keep them happy. I enjoy needling
the blue pigs. Hey blue pig I
was in the park—you were using
fire trucks to mask the sound
of your cruzeing prowls cars. The
dogs never came with in 2

*blocks of me + they were to
the west + there was only 2*

Figure 4.3: The first two pages of the Bus Bomb Letter, postmarked November 9, 1969. Pages 3 and 4 are shown in Figure 4.4 and the bomb diagram from the final page is shown in Figure 4.5.

*groups of parking about 10 min
apart then the motorcycles
went by about 150 ft away
going from south to north west.
ps. 2 cops pulled a goof abot 3
min after I left the cab. I was
walking down the hill to the
park when this cop car pulled up
+ one of them called me over
+ asked if I saw any one
acting supicisous or strange
in the last 5 to 10 min + I said
yes there was this man who
was runnig by waveing a gun
+ the cops peeled rubber +
went around the corner as
I directed them + I dissap-
eared into the park a block +
a half away never to be seen
again.*

*Hey pig doesnt it rile you up
to have you noze rubed in your
booboos?*

*If you cops think Im going to take
on a but in the way I stated I was,
you deserve to have holes in your
heads.*

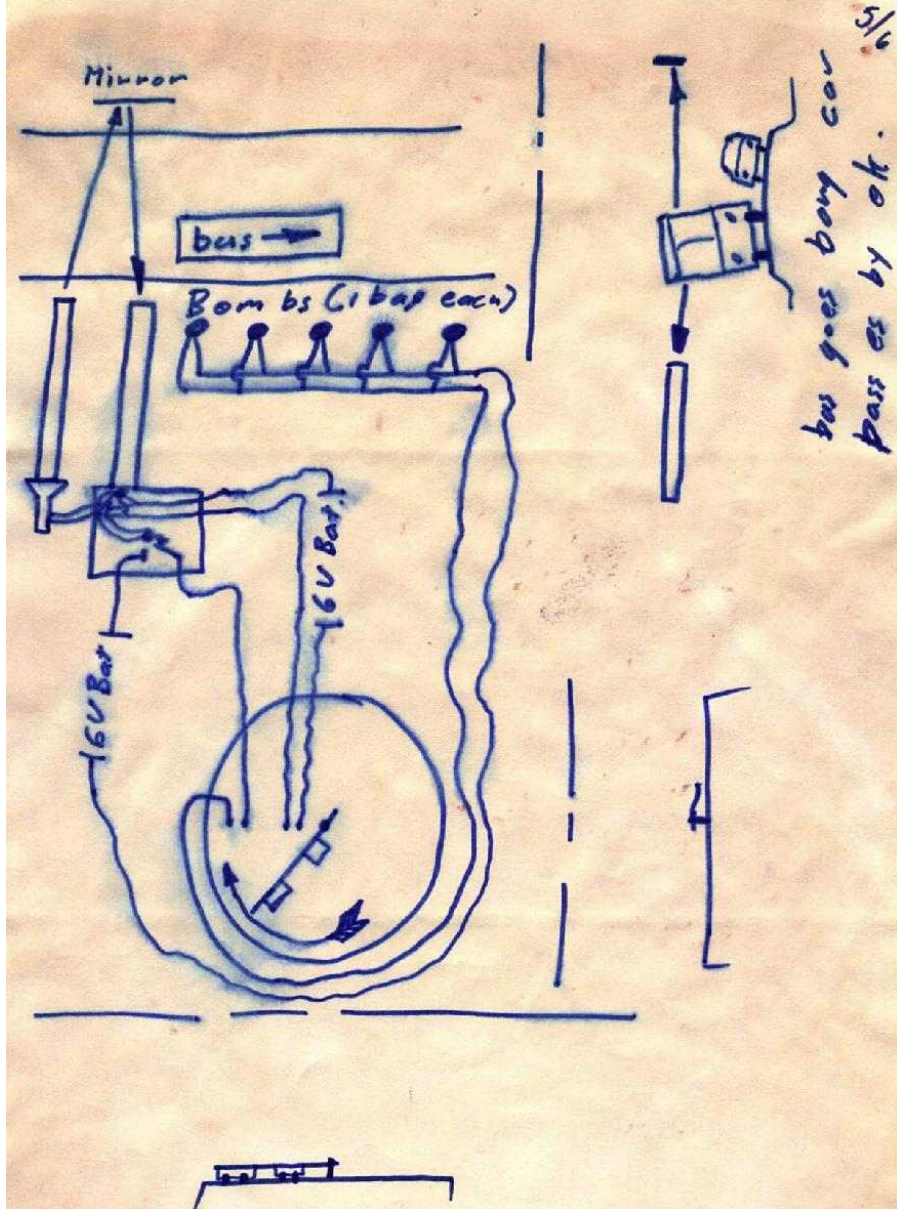
*Take one bag of ammonium nitrate
fertilizer + 1gal of stove oil +
damp a few bags of gravel on
top + then set the shit off
+ will positivily ventalate any
thing that should be in the way
of the Blast.*

The death machine is all ready made. I would have sent you pictures but you would be nasty enough to trace them back to developer + then to me, so I shall describe my masterpiece to you. The nice part of it is all the parts can be bought on the open market with no questions asked.

*1 bat. pow clock—will run for
aprox 1 year
1 photoelectric switch
2 6V car bat
1 flash light bulb + reflector
1 mirror
2 18" cardboard tubes black with
shoe polish in side + out.*

Figure 4.4: Pages 3 and 4 of the Bus Bomb Letter. The Zodiac demanded that the *Chronicle* publish only the postscript starting with “ps. 2 cops pulled a goof” and ending with “never to be seen again.”

Page 5 of the letter had a diagram showing the setup of the supposed bus bomb; it’s depicted in Figure 4.5. The killer signed the letter with a large and curiously annotated version of his Zodiac symbol, shown in Figure 4.6. The closing also included a predictably threatening postscript:



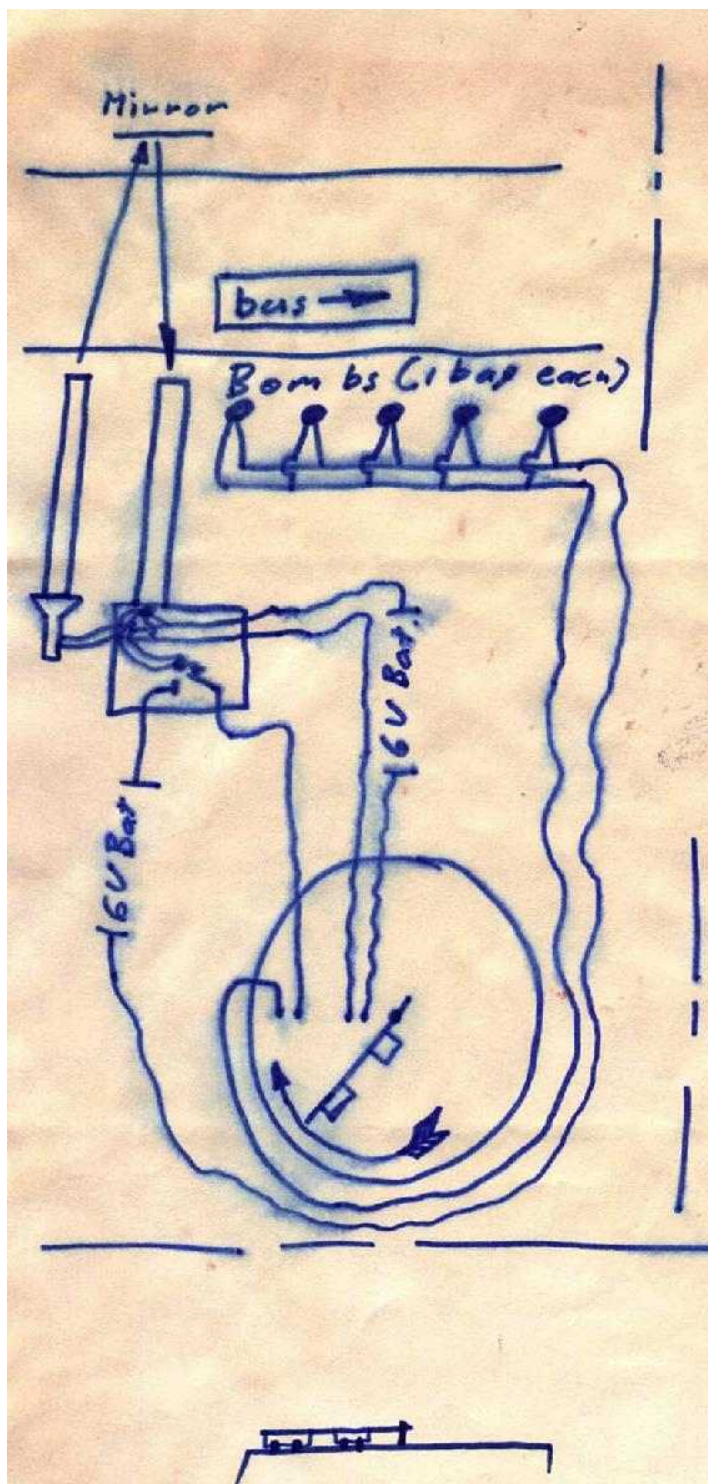


Figure 4.5: The bomb diagram from page 5 of the Bus Bomb Letter

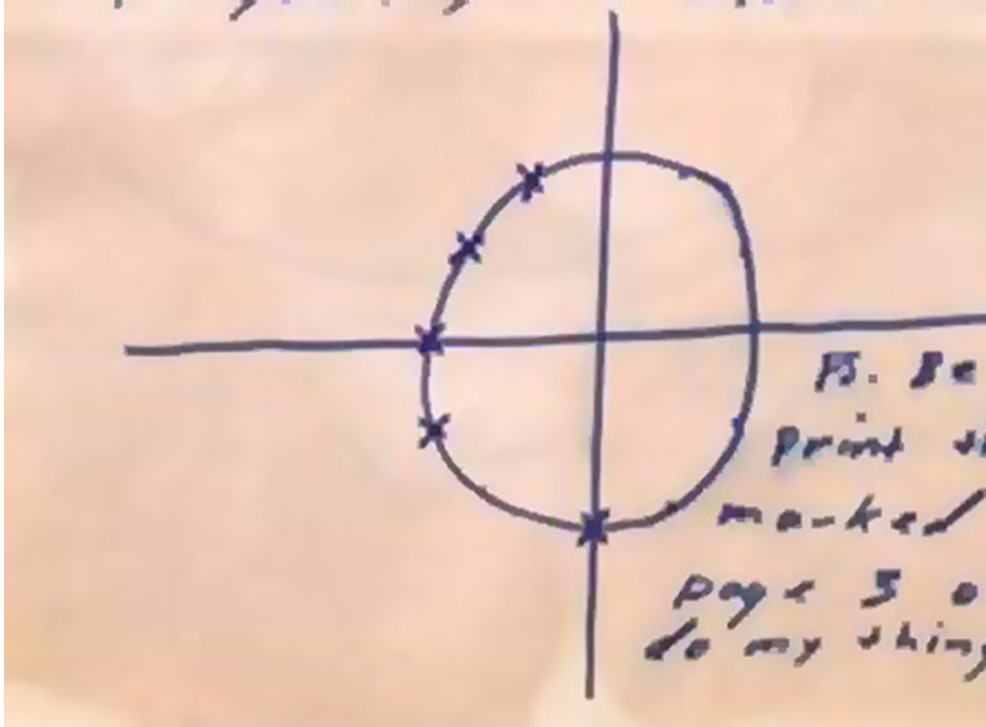
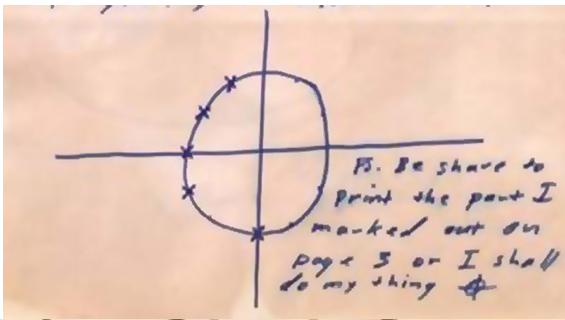


Figure 4.6: The annotated Zodiac symbol signature with the accompanying postscript

*PS. Be sure to
Print the part I
marked out on
page 3 or I shall
do my thing*

The back of the final page included the short passage:

To prove that I am the

*Zodiac, Ask the Vallejo
cop about my electric gun
sight which I used to start
my collecting of slaves.*

As referenced in the postscript, the Zodiac marked the section about two cops pulling a “goof” and declared that it must be published in the newspaper. Interestingly, he made no such demand regarding any other part of the letter. Both the city’s primary dailies obliged the killer’s request, publishing the identified section and substantial parts of the rest of the letter.^{3,8} Notably absent from the coverage, however, was the renewed and updated threat against schoolchildren. SFPD sought and received the cooperation of those who knew about the threat; they agreed to avoid disclosing the information. This time around the nondisclosure of the threat would last much longer than the couple days that had been the case with the original bus threat.

SFPD Chief of Inspectors Martin Lee, the man who had almost certainly been the source of much of the Zodiac’s discontent, responded to the claims in the letter in a manner consistent with his previous statements. Specifically, in regards to the killer’s version of events following the murder of Paul Stine, he said: “That is a lot of... poppycock. His description of the search activities is false. He wasn’t anywhere around there. And it is preposterous that he was stopped and questioned by the officers. That just didn’t happen.”⁷

Importantly, the same day the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* published the Zodiac’s claim that he had been stopped and questioned by a patrol car—over a month after the fact—SFPD Officer Donald Fouke felt compelled to write an official intradepartmental memorandum to Inspectors Armstrong and Toschi clarifying his observations of the man whom he had seen walking near the crime scene in the immediate aftermath of the murder; the man who was undoubtedly the Zodiac. The contents of that memorandum read:

Sir:

I respectfully wish to report the following, that while responding to the area of Cherry and Washington Streets a suspect fitting the description of the Zodiac killer was observed by officer Fouke walking in an easterly direction on Jackson street and then turn north on Maple street. The subject was not stopped as the description received from communications was that of a negro male. When the right description was broadcast reporting officer informed

communications that a possible suspect had been seen going north on Maple Street into the Presidio. The area of Julius Kahn playground and a search was started which had negative results. The suspect that was observed by officer Fouke was a WMA 35–45 Yrs about 5'10'', 180–200 lbs, Medium heavy build—Barrel chested—Medium complexion—Light colored hair possibly graying in rear (May have been lighting that caused this effect.) Crew cut—Wearing glasses—Dressed in dark blue waist length zipper type jacket (Navy or royal blue) Elastic cuffs and waist band zipped part way up. Brown wool pants pleated [sic] type baggy in rear (Rust brown) May have been wearing low cut shoes. Subject at no time appeared to be in a hurry walked with a shuffling lope, Slightly bent forward head down. The subjects general appearance to classify him as a group would be that he might be of Welsh ancestry. My partner that night was officer E. Zelms #1348 of Richmond station. I do not know if he observed this subject or not.

*Respectfully submitted
[Officer Fouke]*

Officer Fouke's accounting of events has changed over the years, but he has consistently maintained that he and Officer Zelms did not stop and talk to the WMA that they observed.^{9,10} Sadly, Eric Zelms was shot and killed in the line of duty on January 1, 1970, less than three months later. Despite Fouke's assertions to the contrary, some additional evidence suggests that the officers may have indeed talked to the suspect. This particular topic tends to provoke the most heated debate among people who are knowledgeable about the investigation. In all likelihood, we will never know exactly what happened.

4.3 The Belli Christmas Letter— December 20, 1969

As Christmas 1969 approached, so too did the one-year anniversary of the Zodiac's first-known murders—those of David Faraday and Betty Lou Jensen who were gunned down on the previous December 20. The killer settled on commemorating the arrival of the anniversary by penning a letter to attorney Melvin Belli, further suggesting that it was, indeed, the Zodiac who requested to speak with him on A.M. *San Francisco*. In characteristic fashion, the killer put blue felt-tip pen to paper and crafted a Christmas-themed correspondence complete with his instantly recognizable hand printing and the to-be-expected grammar and spelling mistakes. In case anyone reading the letter

might harbor any doubts about the author's identity, the killer, for the third time in the span of four communications, enclosed a small swatch of Paul Stine's bloodstained shirt. He neatly printed Melvin Belli's home address on the envelope and secured six Thomas Jefferson one-cent stamps in the standard position, albeit affixed sideways.

With the communiqué ready for delivery, the Zodiac dropped the envelope into a mailbox at an unknown location in San Francisco. The letter was postmarked on the afternoon of Saturday, December 20—undoubtedly just as the fugitive had intended. At this point, the killer would have begun the now-familiar process of waiting for events to unfold.

But the letter's delay in reaching its intended recipient must have frustrated the killer. First, the seasonally high volume of US mail meant that it would take the letter three days to arrive at Belli's address rather than one. Significantly, this delay of a couple days was the difference between Melvin Belli opening the letter personally and somebody else opening it on his behalf, days later because on the day that the Zodiac's letter arrived, Belli was en route to Munich, Germany, to attend a conference. Furthermore, the conference was merely the first part of a European trip that was scheduled to consume several weeks of Belli's time. Other plans included defending a client at a trial in Naples, Italy, and meeting with Eldridge Cleaver, a former leader of the Black Panthers and Bay Area resident, who, at the time, was a fugitive living in Algeria.

Consequently, when the Zodiac's letter arrived on December 23, Belli's housekeeper forwarded it to the attorney's office, where a secretary finally opened the communiqué and discovered the grisly contents. The letter is shown in Figure 4.7.

Dear Melvin

This is the Zodiac speaking I wish you a happy Christmass. The one thing I ask of you is this, please help me. I cannot reach out for help because of this thing in me wont let me. I am finding it extreemly difficult to hold it in check I am afraid I will loose control again and take my ninth & possibly tenth victom. Please help me I am drowning. At the moment the children are safe from the bomb because it is so massive to dig in & the trigger mech requires much work to get it adjusted just right. But if I hold back too long from now on I will loose ~~complet~~ all control of my self & set the bomb up. Please help me I can not remain in control for much longer.



Dear Melvin

This is the Zodiac speaking
wish you a happy Christmas
The one thing I ask of
this, please help me. I
reach out for help because
this thing in me won't
I am finding it extremely
difficult to hold it in check
afraid I will lose control
again and take my nine
possibly tenth victim. Please
help me I am drowning
the moment the children
safe from the bomb because
it is so massive to dig in
trigger mechanism requires me
to get it adjusted just right
if I hold back too long
no nine I will lose control
control of my self & set
bomb up. Please help me
not remain in control for
longer.



Figure 4.7: The Melvin Belli Letter, postmarked December 20, 1969, the

After being apprised of the situation, Melvin Belli, who was still in Munich, instructed his staff to cooperate with the SFPD and local news reporting agencies. Two days after Christmas, an associate of Mr. Belli hand-delivered high-quality reproductions of the killer's latest communication to Munich so Belli could more thoroughly understand the context of the situation.

Both the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner* reported on the latest Zodiac missive, starting with the joint Sunday edition of the newspapers on December 28. The *Chronicle* also published a full image of the letter's envelope in a follow-up article.¹¹ As had been the case weeks earlier, news organizations with knowledge of the bomb threat agreed to comply with the SFPD's request to refrain from mentioning any details related to the subject. Otherwise, the entirety of the letter was disclosed to the public. The following selective quoting of the letter illustrates how the joint edition dealt with omitting mention of the bomb threat.

Please help me I am drowning [sic]

...

*But if I hold back too long from No. nine I will lose all control [sic] of my self...please help me I cannot remain in control for much longer.*¹²

Once again, the content of the letter referred to yet another unaccounted-for victim—so-called victim number eight. The intended implication clearly was that the Zodiac had murdered another person in the intervening weeks between the Bus Bomb Letter and the Belli Letter. This time around, however, there was no indication as to which month, November or December, should be associated with the supposed murder. Regardless, police generally discounted the possibility that the killer had actually claimed another life. Rather, they recognized the thinly veiled boasting of the killer as an intentional pattern of misinformation designed to further taunt an already panic-stricken public, although they were measured in their public proclamations. Inspector Toschi put it this way: "I frankly don't know where he gets those figures. This is coming from him, and I don't know what he's basing it on."¹³

Melvin Belli telephoned the *Chronicle* on Monday, December 28, and made the following appeal to the Zodiac, which the newspaper reported in an article the next day.

You have asked me for help and I promise you I will do everything in my power to provide you with whatever help

you may need or may want. Please write to me in care of the Chronicle and tell me how I may help. If you want to talk with me in person I will meet with you anywhere at any time you designate. If you want to meet with me alone I will come alone. If you want me to bring a priest or a psychiatrist or a reporter to talk with I will do so. I will follow your instructions to the letter.

You say you are ‘losing control’ and may kill again. Do not make things worse. Let me help you now.

I assure you The Chronicle will contact me immediately upon hearing from you and that we will keep this matter in strictest confidence.[11](#)

In the next edition of the daily, Belli continued to address the Zodiac:

I want to stress that the meeting will be in secret. The only persons who will know about it will be the man who wrote to me (Zodiac), myself, and the representative of The Chronicle who will act as my intermediary.[14](#)

The *Examiner* found itself at a competitive disadvantage in that both the Zodiac and Belli were communicating through the *Chronicle*. But the level of competition between San Francisco’s pair of highly prominent newspapers was too intense to allow the *Examiner* to concede defeat so easily. Instead, the staff of the newspaper attacked the problem by simply inserting themselves into the conversation.

...Zodiac, if he is indeed seeking help in controlling ‘this thing in me,’ may contact The Examiner’s city editor, who will act as an intermediary with police and immediately make arrangements with Belli.[13](#)

In the days following the story of the Zodiac’s letter, Belli was confident that the fugitive would follow up his initial contact with some form of action. On December 30, the *Chronicle* reported as much in the article “Belli Sure Zodiac Will Talk to Him.”

As Bay Area residents embarked on the final days of what had been a tumultuous decade, they embraced a new sense of optimism that the strange and enigmatic murderer in their midst would soon be in the custody of law enforcement and that the Zodiac “might voluntarily surrender in search of the help he asked from attorney Melvin Belli,” as the *Examiner* put it. Sadly, like so many other aspects of the case, what started with a justifiable degree of optimism, slowly,

but undeniably, eroded to the point of nothingness. Although there have been enduring lines of speculation and curious anecdotes of hearsay, the simple fact of the matter is that the Zodiac never made any additional, verifiable attempts to contact Melvin Belli.

4.4 Charles Jarman— January 25, 1970

The first few weeks of the new decade passed without significant developments in the case of the Zodiac. Then, in the predawn hours of Sunday, January 25, 1970, somebody flagged down a Yellow Cab taxi, got in, and requested a destination in Presidio Heights. Upon arrival, the passenger fired a single shot into the head of the driver—a man by the name of Charles Jarman who, like Paul Stine, had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. The shooter proceeded to take Jarman's wallet and \$27 which the cabbie had collected over the course of his evening shift. He then disappeared into the night.

During the execution of their normal duties, police officers on patrol discovered the double-parked taxicab. Upon investigation, they realized that the unresponsive Jarman had been shot. An ambulance rushed the taxi driver to San Francisco General Hospital where doctors performed surgery on him. Jarman clung to life for a day and a half, but, ultimately, his injuries were too severe, and he died on Monday evening.^{15,16}

The similarities between the murders of Charles Jarman and Paul Stine were immediately obvious. Both had been taxicab drivers for the Yellow Cab Company. Both were murdered by fares they had picked up downtown and delivered to Presidio Heights. Both lives had been ended by a single bullet to the head. And finally, both murderers stole their victim's wallet after inflicting the fatal injury.

These coincidences were too numerous and too significant to ignore. Furthermore, one particular sentence from the Zodiac's most recent letter was still resonating in the collective consciousness of the Bay Area: "I am afraid I will loose control again and take my nineth + posibly tenth victom." The idea that the killer had returned to his most recent modus operandi to make good on the threat he had delivered less than a month earlier seemed a comfortable stretch of anyone's imagination.

One thing was for sure, the Yellow Cab Company was fed up with its drivers being murdered. The company quickly offered a \$1,000 reward for "information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible" for the murders of Paul Stine and Charles Jarman.¹⁷ The wording was general, but the person the reward was intended to bring to justice was specific: the Zodiac.

Yet, for all of the coincidences, the murder of Charles Jarman

lacked a single piece of evidence that conclusively tied him to the Zodiac. For example, the one telltale indication that the Stine murder was something more than a common robbery gone bad—the Zodiac’s tearing of Stine’s bloodstained shirt—had no equivalent in the case of Jarman. When the days following Jarman’s murder came and went without the Zodiac claiming responsibility, SFPD detectives started to suspect the Zodiac was not involved.

Meanwhile, police identified another suspect: Robert Bromell, a twenty-two-year-old resident of San Francisco who had recently moved to the city from Oregon. Bromell had a criminal record which meant his fingerprints were on file. As had been the case with the Stine investigation, evidence technicians at the Jarman crime scene recovered numerous fingerprints. Some of them were matched to Robert Bromell.

The young man was arrested three days after the shooting. He initially denied any involvement in the death of Jarman, claiming that he was “in bed asleep when it happened” and that police had “made a mistake.”¹⁸ However, after police confronted Bromell with the evidence, he soon confessed; although, he insisted that robbery was his original motive and that the shooting was an accident. In short order, Bromell cooperated fully, leading police to the location where he had disposed of Jarman’s wallet and the murder weapon.¹⁹

4.5 Transformation Complete

The murder of Paul Stine marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the Zodiac. Not only had the crime itself strayed from the behavioral patterns that the killer had previously established, but the way in which the SFPD—Chief of Inspectors Martin Lee in particular—chose to handle the threat posed by the killer profoundly impacted the serial murderer’s evolution. In the month between Stine’s murder and the arrival of the Bus Bomb Letter, the killer wrapped himself in what he perceived to be the intentional telling of lies and misinformation, and in so doing formed a cocoon. By the time he emerged from the cocoon, with the arrival of the Bus Bomb Letter, his criminal persona was irrevocably different. No longer was the killer engaged in what he considered to be a life-and-death game of cat and mouse based on a twisted sense of mutual respect. The SFPD, through the interactions of Martin Lee, had violated the unspoken ground rules and, in so doing, forced the Zodiac to change the nature of the game he was playing. What had been a catch-me-if-you-can type of dynamic was now replaced by a kind of terrorism through uncertainty and ambiguity. Likely, the killer had intended to move in this general direction eventually, even dating back to the early days of the Zodiac persona.

But Martin Lee's actions may have forced the killer to make his move earlier and to a greater extent than he had originally planned. The transformation was, perhaps, not as literal as the "change the way" declaration from the letter itself, but it was no less real and no less significant.

Notes

1. Paul Avery, "That Wasn't Zodiac, Say 3 Who Know," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 24, 1969, 1.
2. "Slayer of 3 Teen Girls Sentenced," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 25, 1971, 29.
3. "Zodiac's New Message," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 12, 1969, 6.
4. Paul Avery, "San Jose Student Held in Slaying of Three Girls," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 1971, 1.
5. Hubert J. Bernhard, "Zodiac Changes Code in New Cryptogram," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 12, 1969, 49.
6. Paul Avery, "Zodiac 'Legally Sane'," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 13, 1969, 2.
7. "I've Killed Seven, The Zodiac Claims," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 12, 1969, 1.
8. Jane Eshleman Conant, "Zodiac Boasts He'll Kill Again," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 12, 1969, 1.
9. *Crimes of the Century, The Zodiac Killer*, hosted by Mike Connors, 1989.
10. David Prior, director, *This Is the Zodiac Speaking*, Paramount Home Entertainment, 2008.
11. Paul Avery, "Urgent Appeal by Belli to Zodiac," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 29, 1969, 1.

12. "New Zodiac Letter—Fears He'll Kill Again," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, December 28, 1969, A1.
13. "Flood of Tips on Zodiac," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 29, 1969, 5.
14. Paul Avery, "Belli Sure Zodiac Will Talk to Him," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 30, 1969, 3.
15. "New Cabbie Attack—Hint of Zodiac," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 26, 1970, 1.
16. "Attacked Cab Driver Dies," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1970, 1.
17. Paul Avery, "Yellow Cab Sets Reward for Zodiac," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 28, 1970, 4.
18. "2 Suspects Arrested in Cabbie's Murder," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 29, 1970, 1.
19. Huel Washington, "Suspect Says He Killed Cab Driver," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 31, 1970, 1.

Chapter 5

Creating Uncertainty

Fear comes from uncertainty.

William Congreve, English playwright and poet
1670–1729

In order to maximize his terroristic impact, the Zodiac began to increase elements of uncertainty in his criminal activity. The killer's initial letter-writing phase had been characterized by fact-based claims of responsibility. But that phase was over; the man's reputation as a serial murderer who posed a danger to the public had been established. This next phase of letter writing—which had begun with the threat of murdering schoolchildren in the closing section of the Stine Letter and the initial murder tally from the Dripping Pen Card—would be characterized by questions such as: *Is this real?* and *What does he mean?* The goal was no longer identity verification—the swatches of Paul Stine's bloodstained shirt had taken care of that—but rather the generation of fear, uncertainty, and doubt. By being less clear about his threats and actions, the killer hoped the public would imagine and fear possibilities that far exceeded reality. To a large extent, that's precisely what happened.

5.1 The Park Station Bombing

Sometime on or before February 16, 1970, an unknown assailant constructed a deadly explosive device with the express intent of killing and maiming members of the San Francisco Police Department. The starting point of the bomb was a section of two-inch galvanized pipe. The man secured a cap to one end of the pipe and then proceeded to fill the pipe with an explosive, in the process mixing in several .22-, .38-, and .45-caliber bullets. Next, he secured a cap at the other end and positioned his triggering mechanism—a modified battery-operated alarm clock that could be used to detonate the explosive after a specific amount of time. Once satisfied, the man took the deadly contraption and made it even deadlier by placing it in a cardboard box filled with ten to twelve pounds of one-and-a-half-inch staples.¹

With the innocent-looking cardboard box in hand, the man made his way to the SFPD's Park Station. Presumably, once nearby, he

discreetly finalized the arming and timing of the device. Then, he approached the police station, left the package on a ledge just outside one of the building's windows, and walked away.

A short time later, the bomb detonated. The blast and its deadly shrapnel injured nine officers. One was partially blinded and forced to retire. But the officer who sustained the gravest injuries was Brian McDonnell, who had the misfortune of sitting at a desk not far from the targeted window. Medical personnel rushed Brian to the hospital where he fought for his life, but his injuries were too severe, and he died two days later.

The repercussions of the bombing were significant. To be sure, the general time frame of the late 1960s and early 1970s was a tumultuous one. Those who lived through it were no strangers to violence. Yet this particular act seemed to have crossed a line. A guerrilla-warfare style assault on the men and women charged with the protection of the public represented a new level of heinousness. Various city entities—including government, newspapers, and other organizations—banded together to fund a \$35,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator.² The hope, of course, was that such a large sum of money would motivate somebody to break his or her silence. It didn't work.

Witnesses reported seeing two white men speeding away from the scene of the crime in a pink Volkswagen bus that had its headlights turned off.³ Investigators suspected the bombing was the work of a radical left-wing group known as the Weather Underground. Despite identification of a fingerprint on one of the bomb fragments in 1999 and several reactivations of the investigation, the case of the Park Station bombing remains unsolved.

5.2 Kathleen Johns— March 22, 1970

Nearly two months went by without meaningful mention of the Zodiac in Bay Area newspapers. Law enforcement continued their investigations unabated, and the public remained acutely aware that the killer had not been apprehended, but from a newsworthiness perspective, there were few developments.

One person who was decidedly unaware of the happenings related to the Bay Area's elusive serial killer was a young woman by the name of Kathleen Johns, who lived in Southern California. Kathleen was a twenty-three-year-old mother of one and was seven months pregnant with her second child.

On Sunday, March 22, Kathleen's mother telephoned her. She claimed to have fallen ill and requested that Kathleen come visit her. This chain of events was not unfamiliar to Kathleen; however, she did

not fully believe that her mother was ill. Nevertheless, she dutifully packed up a few necessities, readied her daughter, and set out on the long journey from Southern California to Petaluma—a city about an hour north of San Francisco.

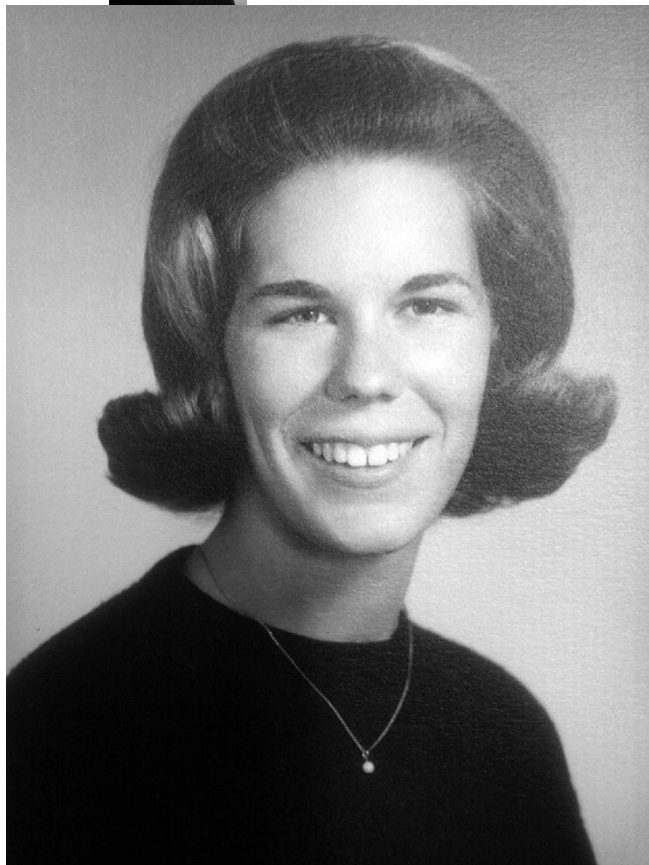
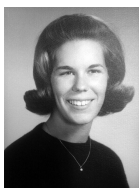


Figure 5.1: Kathleen Johns circa 1965, approximately five years before her encounter with the Zodiac. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

Having made the drive many times before, Kathleen knew the route to Petaluma well. She would head north on Highway 99 to the city of Modesto. Once there, she would turn west, taking a small two-lane road known as Highway 132 over to Interstate 5, where she

would resume her journey northward.

Several hours into the trip, she arrived at the crossover point. Being low on gas, she stopped at a filling station and refueled. Soon she was on her way once again.

By the time Kathleen reached Highway 132, it was just after 11 p.m. She had roughly two more hours of driving before she would arrive at her mother's house. Kathleen was driving a station wagon and had reclined the seats in the rear of the vehicle to create a large, flat area for her daughter to sleep. The infant had awakened when Kathleen stopped for gas, but with the car moving again, she quickly fell back to sleep.

In general, Highway 132 was a lightly traveled road. At 11 p.m. on a Sunday night, it was almost sure to be deserted.

Nevertheless, not long after turning on to the highway, Kathleen noticed a car driving behind her. At first, she thought nothing of it. But then the other driver began to honk his horn and flash his lights. It was obvious that the man was trying to get Kathleen's attention, and he wanted her to pull over.

But, given the lateness of the hour and the remoteness of the location, Kathleen was not comfortable pulling over. She continued driving, wondering what could be motivating this man to act in such a peculiar manner. Her car was old and the thought that there might be some type of serious mechanical problem felt like a real possibility. Regardless, her concern about stopping on an isolated stretch of road outweighed her fear of any such mechanical problem, so she ignored the man and continued to drive.

The car behind Kathleen continued to follow her. Periodically, the driver persisted in trying to attract her attention through similar means. Roughly ten to fifteen minutes later, as she neared Interstate 580, Kathleen noticed a service station ahead in the distance, she decided to find out why the other driver had been trying so desperately to attract her attention. Kathleen slowed her vehicle and stopped on the side of the road.

The other car pulled in front of her station wagon. A man exited the vehicle and walked back to Kathleen's window, which she had already rolled down.

"Your back wheel is wobbly," he said, before adding: "I can fix it for you." Kathleen agreed.

The man returned to the driver-side door of his vehicle and removed a tire iron from inside the car. He walked past Kathleen's window again and proceeded to the back passenger wheel. Over the next few minutes, Kathleen could hear the man doing something to the wheel, presumably fixing it. Apparently done with the task, the man walked back to Kathleen and announced: "It should be OK."

Kathleen said, “Thanks,” as the man returned to his car. He entered his vehicle, started it, and began to drive off.

At the same time, Kathleen started her station wagon and prepared to leave. But almost immediately the car came to a dramatic, lurching stop. Something was seriously wrong. The young mother exited her vehicle and walked around to the back to investigate the problem. The rear wheel, the one the stranger had supposedly fixed, was in danger of becoming completely detached from the car. Only two of the five lug nuts remained, leaving the wheel dangerously unstable.

By this time, the stranger who had helped Kathleen noticed that there was a problem. He stopped, put his car in reverse, and backed up to where he could talk with the young woman. The man made some comment about the situation being worse than he had thought and suggested that he drive Kathleen to the nearby Arco filling station that Kathleen had seen up ahead. Feeling fortunate that the man was still around to help, Kathleen agreed. She spent a few minutes gathering her daughter and a few baby supplies before joining the waiting man in his car.

The first indication that something was not as it should be came when the man failed to stop at the filling station. Initially unconcerned, Kathleen thought that, perhaps, the man had just missed the turn. As time passed and the man kept driving, however, she became convinced that he had never intended to take her to the filling station.

The details of the conversation during the early part of the ride are a bit murky. What is documented in multiple sources is that, at one point, Kathleen sarcastically asked the man: “Do you always go around *helping* people like this?” to which, he replied: “By the time I get through with them, they don’t need help.”^{4,5}

The man drove north on I-580 and exited in what was probably the city of Tracy. He drove on numerous back roads that Kathleen described as vineyards.

At some point, the man said, in a monotone voice devoid of emotion: “You know you’re going to die; you know I’m going to kill you.” Soon after, he then directed her to “throw the baby out the window,” a demand that Kathleen, not surprisingly, ignored.*^{5,6}

Once the man had taken the conversation to this level, Kathleen stopped talking with him altogether. Undeterred, the abductor continued to make the two unnerving statements: “You know you’re going to die; you know I’m going to kill you,” and “throw the baby out the window.”

Kathleen was terrified. However, being seven-months pregnant and holding a ten-month-old infant, her options were few. She decided so long as the man did not actually harm her or her daughter, she would

sit tight and endure his verbal abuse.

After nearly two hours of what felt like aimless wandering, Kathleen finally saw an opportunity and seized it. The man had driven close to Interstate 580 and started to turn the wrong way onto an exit ramp.⁵ Once he realized his mistake, he was forced to stop the car. Kathleen immediately opened the door and, with her daughter in her arms, made a run for it. She ran into a nearby field and eventually made her way to an irrigation ditch that she felt was a good enough place to hide. She crouched down, held her daughter, and waited.

The man exited his car, flashlight in hand, and began looking for her. Kathleen and, much to her relief, her daughter remained silent.

Before long, a truck driver took notice of the situation and, quite noisily, stopped his 18-wheeler. The trucker got out of his rig and asked: "What's going on?"

Without saying a word, the abductor quickly returned to his car and drove off. Soon after, Kathleen came out of hiding. Understanding that something was obviously wrong, the trucker offered to take Kathleen and her daughter to the police department. Still reeling from the shock of accepting a ride from the last man claiming to want to help her, Kathleen refused to go with the trucker. Rather, she insisted that the trucker find a woman to take her to the police station. Although it's unclear how the man managed to do it, a short time later, he did just that.

By 2:30 a.m., Kathleen and her daughter were at the Patterson Police Department. Neither the trucker nor the woman who had driven Kathleen and her daughter to the station were identified; consequently, neither of them ever made statements to police about the incident.

Kathleen began to recount the events of the evening to the officer on duty. She described the circumstances that led up to her accepting a ride in the stranger's car, how the man had passed the Arco station, and the beginning part of the ride.

At this point in the conversation, Kathleen happened to glance at a nearby wall where there were several "wanted" posters. Within the collection was the amended composite of the Zodiac that had been sketched after the Stine murder. Once she saw the poster, Kathleen immediately and unequivocally recognized the man in the poster as the same person with whom she had just spent two-plus hours.

For Kathleen, the identification of the man in the poster as the man who had abducted her was simply a matter of communicating the facts as she knew them to be. Living in Southern California and not paying attention to Bay Area happenings, she had no knowledge of the Zodiac and was completely unaware of his previous crimes. For her, the composite was simply an image that was a "plain as day" match

for her abductor.⁶

As Kathleen was relaying the facts of her story, officers began to report the discovery of a burning car on Highway 132. Later investigation would confirm the car was, indeed, Kathleen's. Apparently, the abductor had returned to the vehicle and set it ablaze.

Kathleen and her daughter remained in Patterson through the night and later were taken to the San Joaquin Sheriff's Office where they spent most of the next day. Eventually, the sheriff's office managed to contact Kathleen's husband, who drove up from San Bernardino.⁶

The young mother and daughter returned home, some 350 miles to the south, never having completed their journey to visit Kathleen's mother. Officers from the Patterson Police Department and the San Joaquin Sheriff's Office filed the requisite reports. The details of the incident were communicated, in some fashion, to detectives Armstrong and Toschi at the SFPD. Meanwhile, the local paper, the *Modesto Bee*, and the *Examiner* both ran stories about the incident on the following day.^{1,7}

At the time, law enforcement assigned little weight to Kathleen's claims that she had been abducted by somebody who looked exactly like the Zodiac. For reasons that are difficult to pin down, police were dismissive. However, four months later, the killer himself forced people to reconsider the question when he made a vague but clearly recognizable claim of responsibility.

5.3 The "My Name Is" Letter— April 20, 1970

The people of the Bay Area next heard from the Zodiac on April 22, 1970, when his latest missive was published in both the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*. The letter, shown in Figure 5.2, had been mailed from San Francisco and had been postmarked on the morning of Monday, April 20. In the usual fashion, the letter was sent to the "Editor" at the *Chronicle*, and the envelope was stamped with twice the necessary postage.

This time around, however, there was no swatch of Paul Stine's shirt. Nevertheless, the mention of the bomb threat, which still had not been disclosed to the public, made it clear that the author was, indeed, the Zodiac.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
By the way have you cracked
the last cipher I sent you?*

My name is—

A E N K M N A M

*I am mildly cerous as to how
much money you have on my
head now. I hope you do not
think that I was the one
who wiped out that blue
meannie with a bomb at the
cop station. Even though I talked
about killing school children with
one. It just wouldn't doo to
move in on someone elses territory.
But there is more glory in killing
a cop than a cid because a cop
can shoot back. I have killed
ten people to date. It would
have been a lot more except
that my bus bomb was a dud.
I was swamped out by the
rain we had a while back.*

*The new bomb is set up like
this*

[see Figure 5.3]

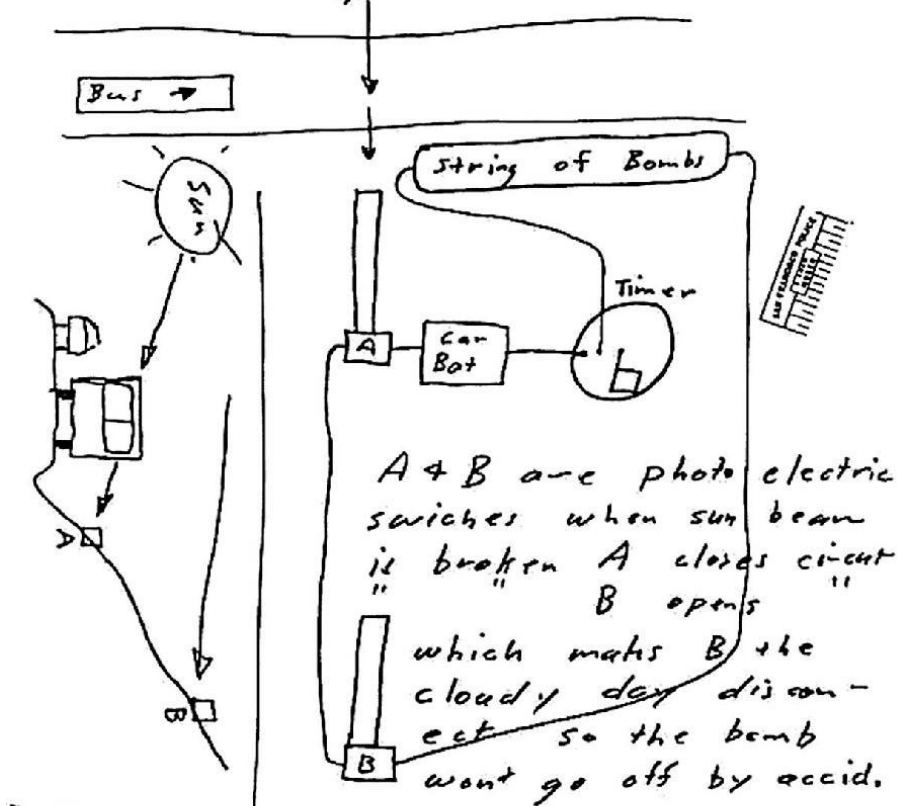
*PS I hope you have fun trying
To figgure out who I killed*

Figure 5.2: The “My Name Is” Letter, postmarked April 20, 1970

The second page of the letter, shown in Figure 5.3, provided the details of an updated bus bomb circuit, one that seemed generally simpler than the original. The killer concluded with his now standard score, where he claimed to have murdered ten people while attributing a value of zero to SFPD.

The new bomb is set up like this

Sun light in early morning

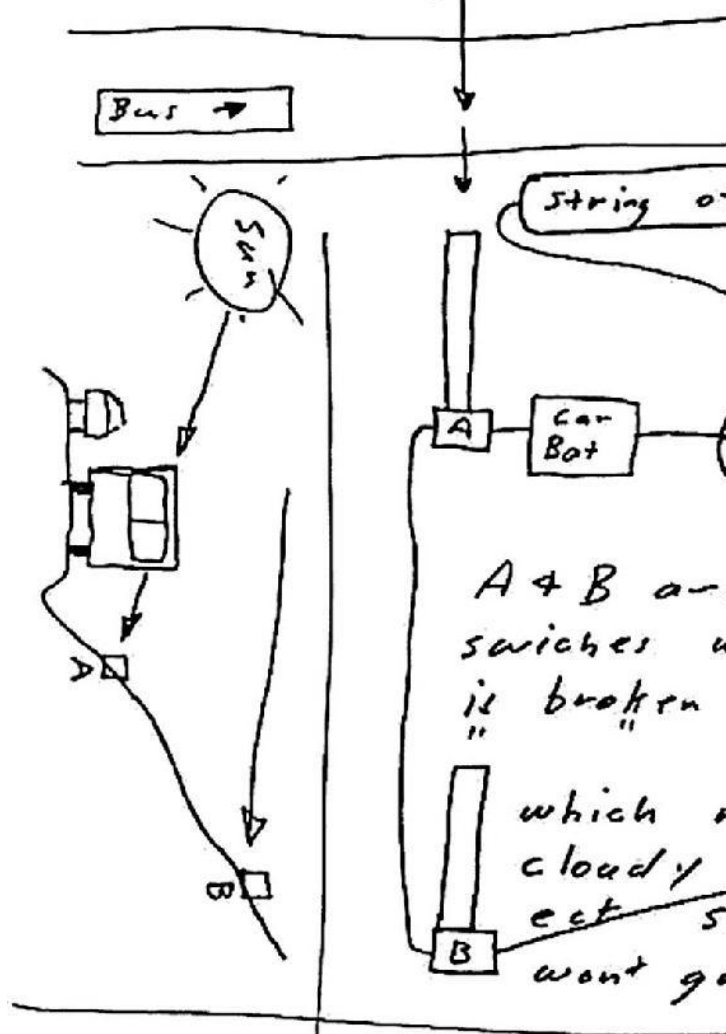


PS I hope you have fun trying to figure out who I killed

$\phi = 10$ SFPD = 0

The new bomb is so
this

Sun light in ear



PS I hope you have
to figure out who I k

$\phi = 10$

Figure 5.3: Page 2 of the "My Name Is" Letter, including the second

Of course, the “last cipher” is referring to the 340, which remains unsolved to this day. The new cipher included with the letter contained only thirteen symbols, four of which were repeated one or more times. This cipher is sometimes called the “13” or, alternatively, the “My Name Is” cipher. With so few symbols and, in particular, so few repeated symbols, this cipher has too many possible solutions and hence it likely will never be solved to the satisfaction of most people; at least not without the benefit of validating a proposed solution through some other means, such as the Zodiac confessing and explaining the meaning, or possibly other corroborating evidence supporting a particular solution.

Regarding the arrival of the letter, SFPD Inspector David Toschi was quoted as saying: “Here we go again,” while his partner, William Armstrong, pointed out: “We’d... rather receive letters than bodies.”^{8,9}

Following now established procedures, the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner* reported the news of the letter, omitting any reference to the renewed, and now updated, bomb threat. An image of the letter up to the mention of the bomb, including the cipher, was published in the April 22 edition of the *Chronicle*. Both newspapers included the following quote which was edited to omit the mention of the bus bomb:

I have killed ten people to date it would have been a lot more except ... I was swamped out by the rain we had a while back.^{8,9}

Despite the ultimately effective omission of information regarding the bus bomb threat, there are characteristics of the reporting that, having the benefit of hindsight, can be interpreted as hinting at the existence of the threat. Paul Avery, the *Chronicle* reporter who covered most of the Zodiac story, explained that the staff at the *Chronicle* and detectives from the SFPD were convinced that the Zodiac had legitimately authored the letter, noting that some portions of the communiqué were being withheld.⁸ Furthermore, the section of the article that discussed the Park Station bombing was given a subheading of “BOMB,” which, on first inspection, seemed to suggest that the Zodiac was engaging in some type of bomb-related activity.

Certainly, Bay Area law enforcement agencies were giving the Zodiac an appropriate level of attention. However, with only the partial details of a letter, a cipher that felt hard to take seriously, the numerous inflated claims of responsibility, and a lack of new and definite crimes, the public’s attention span for the Zodiac was diminishing.

5.4 The Dragon Card— April 28, 1970

Clearly, the killer was not satisfied with the level of attention that he was receiving from the media. By this point, he had constructed not one but two sophisticated bomb circuits that were sure to strike terror into the hearts of each and every parent of a school-age child in the Bay Area—at least that would have been his perception. Yet in the five-plus months since the original bomb threat, the public had not heard one word about his masterpieces. This continued systematic omission of details about the bomb threat and the diminished coverage of the killer's previous letter finally compelled the man to raise the stakes.

In characteristic form, the Zodiac responded to the situation by mailing an ultimatum, which was detailed on a wryly humorous greeting card. The killer dropped the communiqué into a San Francisco mailbox sometime on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 28, just six days after his last letter.

The card itself was a play on words. The outside read “Sorry to Hear” and had a picture of a prospector riding a mule-like animal. The inside continued “Your ass is a dragon” and showed a similar prospector riding a dragon. The card is shown in [Figure 5.4](#); the content from the back of the card is re-created in [Figure 5.5](#).

SORRY
TO HEAR



YOUR ASS IS A DRAGON



I hope you
enjoy your
selves
when I
have my
Blast.



P.S. on
back



Figure 5.4: The inside of the Dragon Card. Image reproduced with permission from the *San Francisco Chronicle* / Polaris.

If you dont want me to
have this blast you must
do two things. 1 Tell every
one about the bus bomb with
all the details. 2 I would like
to see some nice Zodiac butons
wandering about town. Every
one else has these buttons like,
, black power, melvin eats
blubber, etc. Well it would cheer
me up considerably if I saw
a lot of people wearing my
buton. Please no nasty ones
like melvin's.
Thank you

Figure 5.5: The content of the Dragon Card

San Francisco Police asked the *Chronicle* to delay reporting on the letter, and, once again, the newspaper cooperated. But just a day later, Police Chief Alfred Nelder instructed the *Chronicle* to move forward with printing the story and to include the killer's bus bomb threat. In commenting on his decision, Nelder said: "I weighed all sides of the question and concluded this information should be made public."¹⁰

On May 1, 1970, nearly six months after first making the threat, the Zodiac finally got his wish with the publication of his intention to blow up a school bus. "New Zodiac Threat—Bizarre Twist," appeared on page 8 of the *Chronicle*. In the article, Paul Avery recounted the contents of the most recent letter, describing a "crude homemade bomb"—however, he omitted any images showing the alleged setup—and detailing the killer's request for people to wear Zodiac buttons. Though technically complying with the dictates of the fugitive's ultimatum, the SFPD and the *Chronicle* managed to release the news of the bomb threat in a way that minimized its impact. Strictly speaking, the killer got what he had demanded. More generally, however, the results surely fell short of providing the sadistic satisfaction that the man had been fantasizing about for months. The tactical decision to delay the news of the bomb threat had played out much to the advantage of the SFPD. The department may not have been any closer to winning the war against the serial killer in their midst, but they had certainly won a battle.

5.5 Richard Radetich— June 19, 1970

A month and a half later, in the early-morning hours of Friday, June 19, 1970, twenty-five-year-old San Francisco Police Officer Richard Radetich was alone in his patrol car executing his duties as a member of the Traffic Division. At 5:20 a.m., he issued a citation for a vehicle parked in front of a fire hydrant near Scott and Haight Streets. After finishing, he continued his search for citable offenses on nearby Waller Street. He didn't have to go far—minutes later he positioned his patrol car's spotlight on a particular vehicle that lacked a proper 1970 license tag. As he sat in the car, he grabbed his citation book and began writing. The time was 5:25 a.m.

In the ensuing moments, an unknown assailant approached the patrol car, fired three shots of a .38-caliber handgun through the driver's-side window, returned to his nearby vehicle, and quickly sped away. One of the three bullets struck Radetich squarely in the left temple.



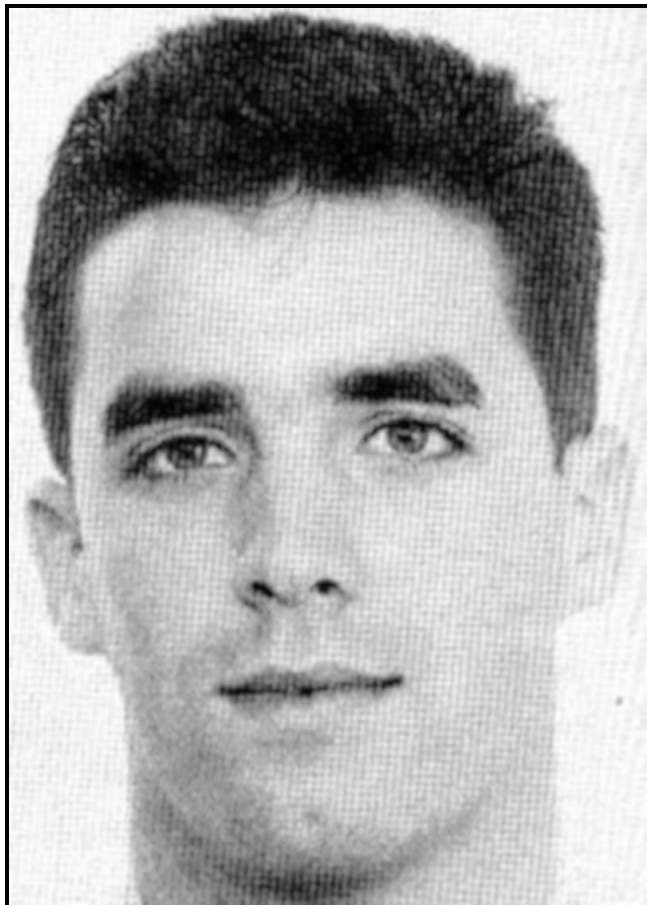


Figure 5.6: A headshot of Richard Radetich from his Find A Grave memorial.¹¹

Within minutes, nearby residents were on the phone to police reporting the sounds of gunfire and the possible involvement of a police officer. Two SFPD patrolmen quickly arrived on the scene and found an unresponsive Officer Radetich slumped over in the front seat of his patrol car, radio microphone still in hand. Soon after, medical responders rushed Radetich to San Francisco General Hospital where he clung to life for nearly fourteen hours before finally succumbing to his injuries at 8:02 p.m.¹²

5.6 The Button Letter— June 26, 1970

The summer of 1970 would prove to be a time of prolific writing for the Zodiac. After a silence just shy of two months, the man once again put blue felt-tip pen to paper, creating one of the most puzzling pieces of correspondence in the killer's known writing. In addition to the

letter itself, the unknown author included a page-size map of the San Francisco Bay Area; it was an inset he had taken from a larger 1969 Phillips 66 map of California. On the map, centered on the peak of Mount Diablo, the killer drew a version of his Zodiac symbol and annotated the numbers 0, 3, 6, and 9, sequentially assigning a direction to each of the numbers, starting with 0 as north and continuing clockwise. Additionally, the killer wrote a short instruction, indicating that 0 was to be set to “Mag. North,” an obvious abbreviation for magnetic north. See Figure 5.9.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
I have become very upset with
the people of San Fran Bay
Area. They have not complied
with my wishes for them to
wear some nice buttons.
I promised to punish them
if they did not comply, by
anilating a full School Buss.
But now school is out for
the summer, so I punished
them in another way.
I shot a man sitting in
a parked car with a .38.*

– 12 SFPD – 0

*The Map coupled with this
code will tell you where the
bomb is set. You have until
next Fall to dig it up.*

Figure 5.7: The Button Letter, postmarked June 26, 1970

The “code” was the Zodiac’s fourth and final cipher, shown in Figure 5.8. The killer created the cryptogram using thirty-two symbols, most of which appear only once in the cipher. Three symbols, however, are used twice.

The *Chronicle* published the details of the letter almost immediately, although no images were included, so the descriptions were purely textual. The line about a person being shot with a .38-caliber weapon while sitting in a parked car appeared to be a reference to Officer Radetich, who had lost his life just a week earlier.

The news coverage of the patrolman's homicide had been extensive, and nobody else in recent memory had been murdered or shot under similar circumstances. The connection seemed obvious, although the killer's phrasing strangely stopped just short of a final explicit detail that would have made the linkage unmistakable, such as using the word "cop" or mentioning Radetich by name. For their part, the SFPD was quick to dismiss the possibility that the Zodiac could have been responsible for the crime. "If he's hinting he shot Officer Radetich then he's lying. We have already issued an arrest warrant in the case,"¹³ explained one homicide inspector.



Figure 5.8: The 32 cipher from the Zodiac's Button Letter



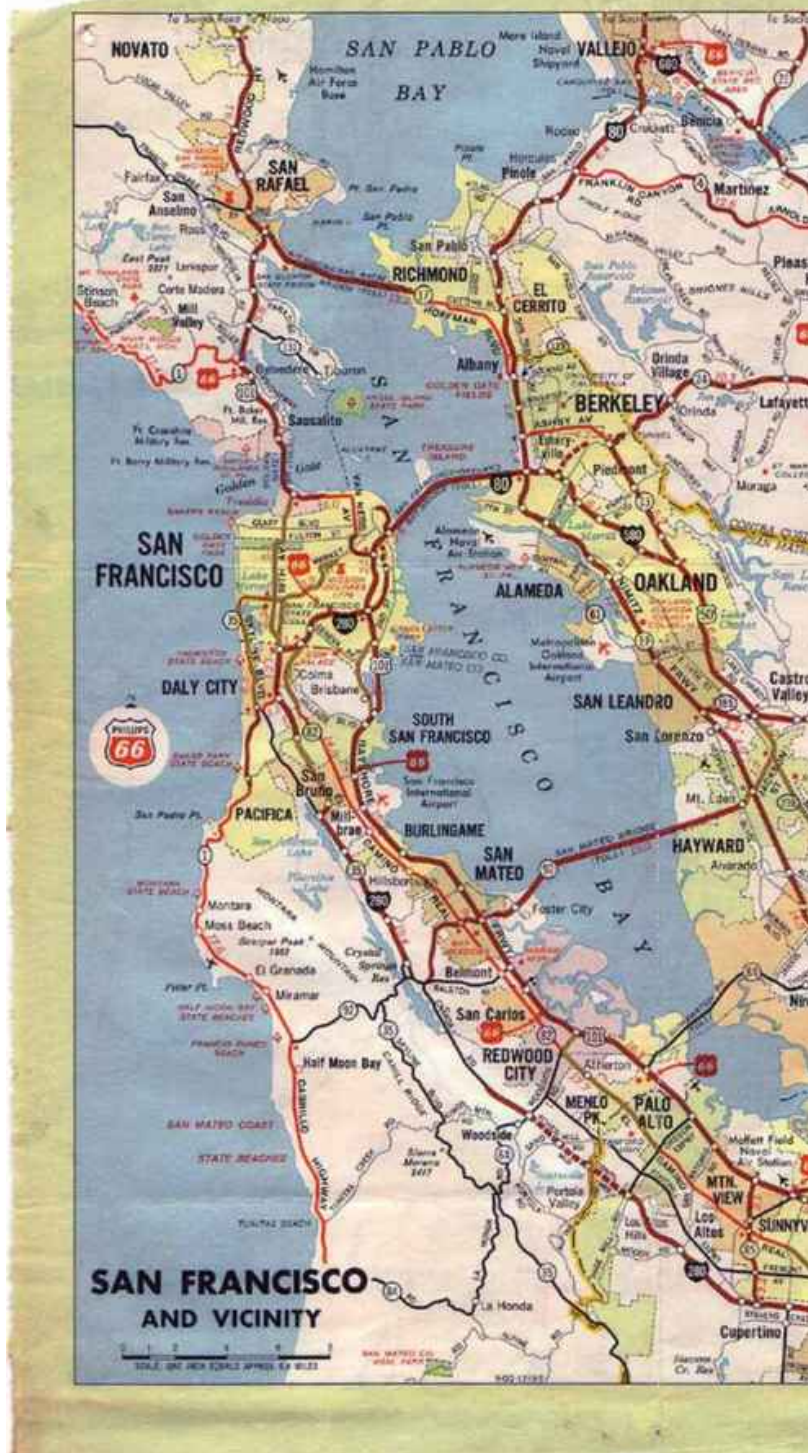


Figure 5.9: The map of the Bay Area sent by the Zodiac, including the

annotated Zodiac symbol centered on Mount Diablo. This inset was taken from a larger 1969 Phillips 66 map of California. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

5.7 The Kathleen Johns Letter— July 24, 1970

The Zodiac next wrote to the *Chronicle* just under a month later. The letter was notably short and referred to an incident that was clearly the abduction of Kathleen Johns and her infant daughter.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
I am rather unhappy because
you people will not wear some
nice buttons. So I now
have a little list, starting with
the woeman + her baby that I
gave a rather interesting ride
four a couple howers one
evening a few months back that
ended in my burning her
car where I found them.*

Figure 5.10: The Kathleen Johns Letter, July 24, 1970

By this point in time, the SFPD, the *Chronicle*, and, to a lesser extent, the *Examiner* had been reacting to and reporting on news of the Zodiac's letters for almost an entire year. The process had evolved into a well-established practice. The killer sent the letters, the newspapers shared the contents with the SFPD and reported on the arrival of the communiqués, usually including most, if not all, relevant details and often an image or two. The public, for its part, reacted fleetingly, not because developments in the case were unimportant, but because there was little that members of the public could do to change the course of the investigation. Everyone in the Bay Area would have liked to see the killer caught; however, few people were in a position to do anything more than let law enforcement handle the investigation and simply hope for the best. Meanwhile, although many months had passed since the last definite murder attributed to the killer, the man was obviously continuing to bask in the experience of having his letters published for all the world to read.

If there had been any disruption in the above-described transactions during the previous year, it was the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* agreeing to omit references to the killer's bus bomb threat.

Notably, most impartial observers would agree that this deviation from the norm had been a success. As it turned out, the value of this approach was twofold. First, simply delaying the acknowledgment served to distance the threat from the murder of the killer's last-known definite victim, Paul Stine. The original threat had been postmarked November 9, 1969, just under a month after Stine's murder and a couple of weeks after the hysteria that had gripped the Bay Area during the aftermath of the Stine Letter. In contrast, the people of the Bay Area finally learned of the bomb threat on May 1 of the next year, by which point it had been nearly seven months since the killer had been definitively linked to a new murder.

To be sure, the SFPD had no guarantees that events would unfold as they did. In a very real sense, the strategy was a gamble. But, given the circumstances in early November 1969, the gamble represented a calculated risk that, in the final analysis, made sense.

The second way in which postponing the acknowledgment of the bomb threat proved valuable is that it allowed the SFPD to shape public opinion. In particular, the department—primarily Chief of Inspectors Martin Lee—continued to paint the portrait of the killer as someone who was both ineffectual and a liar. Regardless of what Lee might have actually believed, he clearly employed a strategy to his official statements that was intended to minimize the public's fear and dampen its reaction. He wanted to convey that the man was more lucky than competent and that anything the Zodiac said was not to be believed.

It must have been thoughts like these that motivated the next move by the SFPD and the *Chronicle*. In contrast to the way in which the Zodiac letters were handled for the previous year, the powers that be at the *Chronicle* decided they would neither publish nor acknowledge the receipt of such letters for an undetermined amount of time. So, starting with the "Kathleen Johns Letter," the newspaper began a self-imposed vow of silence.

5.8 The *Mikado* Letter— July 26, 1970

There's an argument to be made that the timing of the *Chronicle*'s Zodiac letter blackout was unfortunate in that it happened just before the killer sent one of his most interesting and remarkable communiqués.

The unusually short Kathleen Johns Letter was, in fact, but a precursor of things to come just two days later. The killer, apparently feeling particularly verbose, decided to expand on what he meant by the phrase "little list" in the form of a five-page diatribe that represents one of the more bizarre entries in the entire collection of

Zodiac letters. Because of the content, this letter has come to be known as the *Mikado* Letter, or, alternatively, the Little List Letter.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
Being that you will not wear
some nice buttons, how about
wearing some nasty buttons.
Or any type of buttons that
you can think up. If you do
not wear any type of
buttons I shall (on top of every
thing else) torture all 13
of my slaves that I have
wateing for me in Paradise.
Some I shall tie over ant hills
and watch them scream + twich
and squirm. Others shall have
pine splinters driven under their
nails + then burned. Others shall
be placed in cages + fed salt
beef until they are gorged then
I shall listen to their pleass
for water and I shall laugh at
them. Others will hang by
their thumbs + burn in the
sun then I will rub them down
with deep heat to warm*

*them up. Others I shall
skin them alive + let them
run around screaming. And
all billiard players I shall
have them play in a dark
ened dungon all with crooked
cues + Twisted Shoes.
Yes I shall have great
Fun inflicting the most
Delicious of pain to my
Slaves*

SFPD = 0 = 13

Figure 5.11: The first two pages of the *Mikado* Letter

Once again, the criminal expressed his discontent with the people of San Francisco for not wearing “nice” Zodiac buttons. However, in an unusual attempt at compromise, the killer retreated from his previous position that “nasty” Zodiac buttons would be unacceptable, explaining that he now would be OK with “any type of buttons.”

The remainder of the letter is divided into two distinct sections. The first part is a disturbing fantasy based on the killer’s supposed belief that all of his murder victims will become his slaves in the afterlife, as he’d originally communicated in the 408 cipher. Through rambling imagery, the man details several different ways he will torture these so-called slaves.

The second part of the letter is an adaptation of a verse sung by the character Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner, from *The Mikado*—a Gilbert and Sullivan comedic opera that has enjoyed continuous popularity since its original opening in 1885. Through the lines of the verse, Ko-Ko explains that, in his role as Lord High Executioner, he must maintain a “little list” of potential victims for the eventuality that he is called upon to perform the duties of his job. The list amounts to a collection of people who exhibit certain characteristics or engage in certain actions that society (really Ko-Ko) finds objectionable.

On page 2 of the letter, after the first section, the killer provided his standard signature in the form of a large Zodiac symbol accompanied by his now ever-present, taunting score, which he gave as: 13, SFPD 0. The full text of the letter is shown in Figures 5.11 and 5.12.

The killer closed the letter with another large Zodiac symbol, and centered the following postscript on the bottom of the symbol, as shown in Figure 5.14.

*PS. The Mt. Diablo Code concerns
Radians + # inches along the radians*

Much to the undoubted dismay of the Zodiac, the *Chronicle* continued its newly adopted policy of not publicly acknowledging the letters it received from the killer. Hence, the public had no opportunity to react to the unusually lengthy letter. In fact, since the killer was not engaging in otherwise newsworthy activities and the *Chronicle* was remaining silent about the communications that it received, there was simply nothing to report during this time frame.

*As some day it may hapen
that a victom must be found.*

*I've got a little list. I've
got a little list, of society
offenders who might well be
underground who would never
be missed who would never be
missed. There is the pest-
ulential nucences who whrite
for autographs, all people who
have flabby hands and irritat-
ing laughs. All children who
are up in dates and implore
you with implatt. All people
who are shakeing hands shake
hands like that. And all third
persons who with unspooling
take those who insist. They'd
none of them be missed. They'd
none of them be missed. There's
the banjo seranader and
the others of his race and
the piano orginast I got him
on the list. All people who
eat peppermint and phomphit*

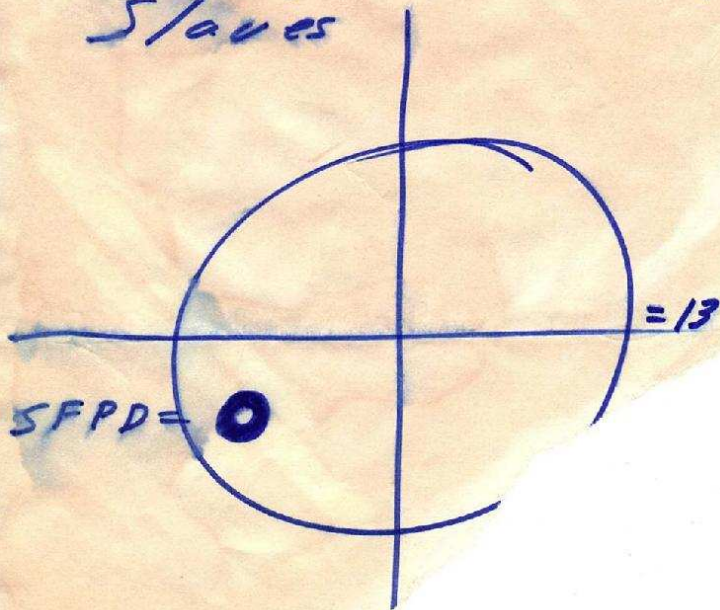
*in your face, they would
never be missed They would
never be missed And the
Idiout who phraises with in-
thusastic tone of centuries
but this and every country but
his own. And the lady from
the provences who dress like
a guy who doesn't cry and
the singurly abnomily the
girl who never kissed. I don't
think she would be missed
Im shure she wouldn't be
missed. And that nice impriest
that is rather rife the judic-
ial hummerest I've got him on
the list All funny fellows, com-
mic men and clowns of private
life. They'd none of them be
missed. They'd none of them be*

*missed. And uncompromising
kind such as wachamacallit,
thingmebob, and like wise, well-
nevermind, and tut tut tut tut,
and whatshisname, and you know*

*who, but the task of filling
up the blanks I rather leave
up to you. But it really does-
n't matter whom you place
upon the list, for none of
them be missed, none of
them be missed.*

Figure 5.12: Pages 3–5 of the *Mikado* Letter

them up. Others I shall
skin them alive & let them
run around screaming. And
all billiard players I shall
have them play in a dark
ened dargon cell with crooked
cues & Twisted Shoes.
Yes I shall have great
fun in flicting the most
delicious of pain to my
S/aves



them up. Others
skin them alive &
run around screaming
all billiard players
have them play
ened dargon call
cues & Twisted
Yes I shall have
Fun in flicting the
delicious of pain
Slaves

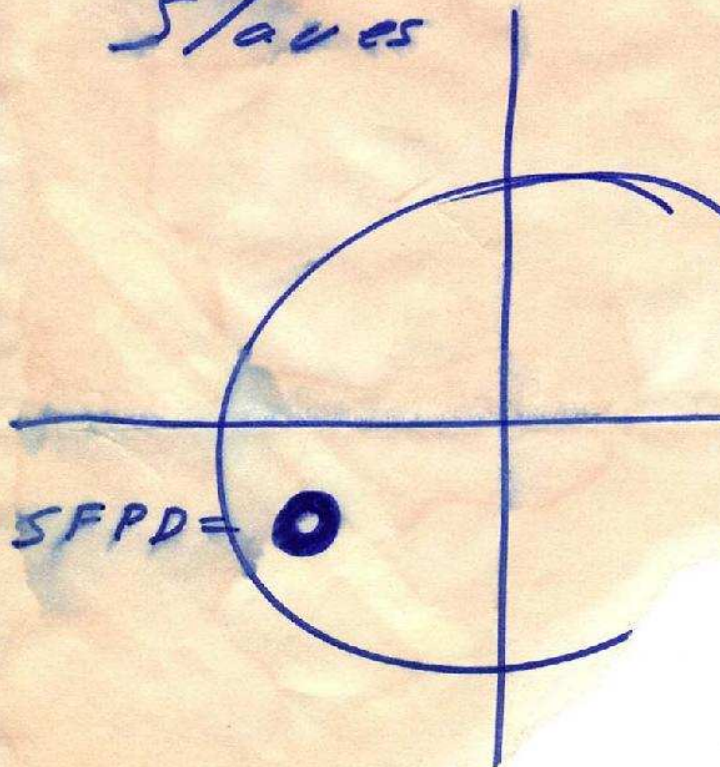
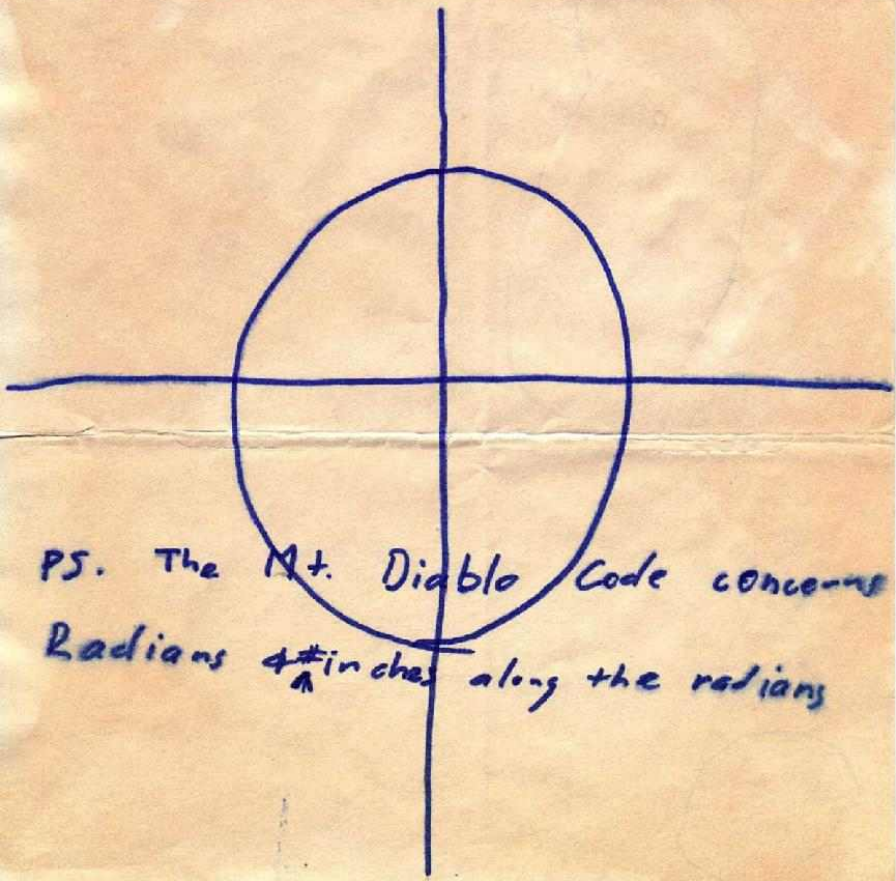


Figure 5.13: The torn second page of the Mikado Letter. Details as to how the page was torn are unknown. In a strangely creative way, the killer

incorporated his ever-present score into the large Zodiac symbol that he used to conclude the first section of the letter.

who, but the task of filling up the blanks I rather leave up to you. But it really doesn't matter whom you place upon the list, for none of them be missed, none of them be missed.



PS. The Mt. Diablo Code concerns
Radians ~~4~~₁ inches along the radians

who, but the task
up the blanks I rat
up to you. But it
it matter whom you
upon the list, for n
them be missed, no
them be missed.

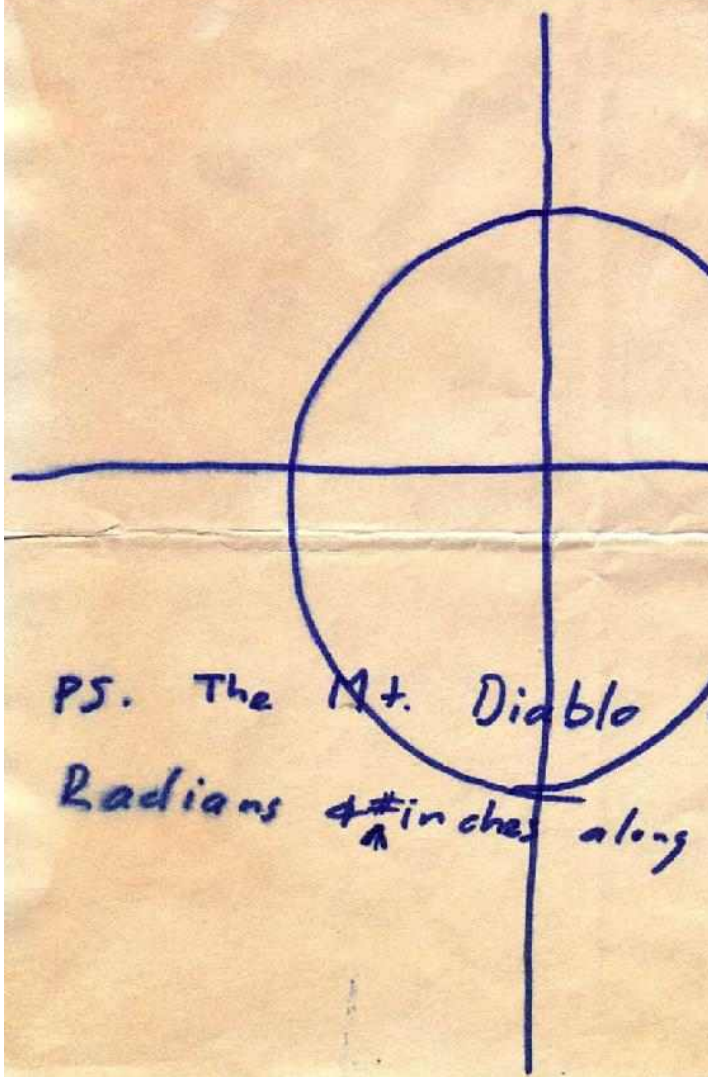


Figure 5.14: The fifth and final page of the Mikado Letter showing the

5.9 A Notable Analysis

In stark contrast to the lack of publicly noticeable developments, investigative activities behind the scenes at the SFPD were bustling. As was now the routine response for communiqués received from the Zodiac, Inspectors Armstrong and Toschi employed the professional services of Sherwood Morrill to confirm what everybody already knew to be true, that the handwriting from both the Kathleen Johns and the *Mikado* Letters was a match to the previous handwriting in the case.

Meanwhile, the SFPD Crime Laboratory took up the task of processing the letters for latent fingerprints. By July 31, the inspector at the crime lab who was responsible for the analysis had completed his work and summarized the results in a document that was just over a page long. It read, in part:

Eight latent fingerprints were developed from one of the letters. These prints are from two different pages. It is possible to determine the pattern of each of the prints. All are individually identifiable with the possible exception of the print that is believed to be the right little finger. Six of the latent prints were developed on the letter in a position that indicates they are impressions of the middle, ring and little fingers of the right and left hand. Two of the latent prints may be of the thumb or index finger of the right and left hand.

*Elimination prints have been obtained of all the persons connected with the newspaper and the Police Department who could have possibly handled the letters. The latent prints have not been eliminated.*¹⁴

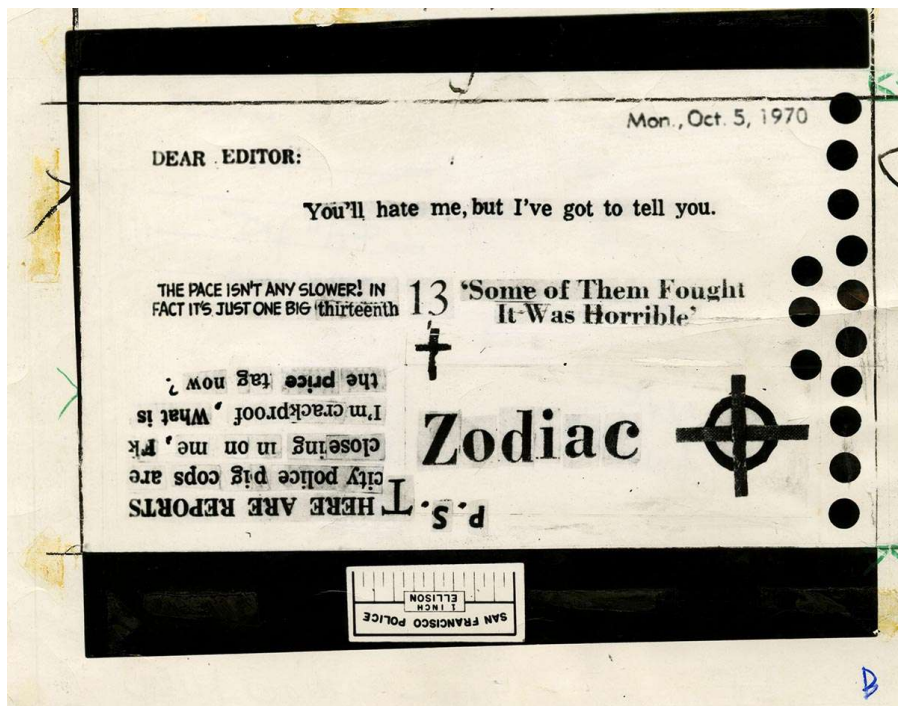
When Armstrong and Toschi requested assistance from the FBI—which happened regularly as a normal part of the investigation—they stated that the inspector who performed the analysis believed the fingerprint from the left ring finger bore a similarity to the bloody fingerprint obtained from Paul Stine’s taxicab door.¹⁵ This is the only publicly known instance of law enforcement acknowledging similarity between fingerprints collected from the numerous crime scenes and letters associated with the Zodiac.

5.10 The Crackproof Card— October 6, 1970

October 5, 1970, was a Monday. Like every other day from that era,

hundreds of thousands of people across the Bay Area picked up and read some of the *Chronicle* in the hopes of learning more about the news of the day.

But somewhere in or around San Francisco, a man sat down, *Chronicle* in hand, with an altogether different purpose. He proceeded to cut out words, phrases, and letters from the paper. He then crafted a makeshift postcard by gluing the cutouts onto a standard three-by-five-inch index card and addressed it to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The content side of the card is shown in Figure 5.15.



DEAR EDITOR:

You'll hate me, but I've

THE PACE ISN'T ANY SLOWER! IN
FACT IT'S JUST ONE BIG thirteenth

13

'Some
It-W

+

city police pig cops are
closing in on me, Fk
I'm crackproof, What is
the price tag now?

Zod

P.S. THERE ARE REPORTS



Figure 5.15: The content side of the Crackproof Card. Image reproduced with permission from the *San Francisco Chronicle* / Polaris.

The killer glued the postscript section upside down relative to the remainder of the content. Additionally, he took a hole punch and punched thirteen holes along the right side: one column of ten holes and a second column of three holes. Clearly, the killer was again

intending to convey his alleged victim count—which remained at thirteen as stated in the Mikado Letter—and each hole represented one of the supposed victims. Law enforcement, of course, still could only account for five definite victims.

The author of the card dropped his masterpiece in the mail, presumably somewhere in San Francisco, probably on Tuesday, October 6. It arrived at the offices of the *Chronicle* on Wednesday. The newspaper handed the card over to SFPD detectives who oversaw an examination that lasted two days. With no actual handwriting, the standard method of authentication was unavailable. Nevertheless, they concluded that the communiqué was quite likely authentic, presumably based on the content.

Though the specifics of the conversations are unknown to us, the SFPD and the *Chronicle* agreed that the newspaper would, once again, report on the developments in the case of the Zodiac. Furthermore, they decided not only to reveal the details of the latest card but also to come clean about the two previously unreported letters from the killer.

Paul Avery, the writer who normally handled the Zodiac case, began crafting his story. The article “Gilbert and Sullivan Clue to Zodiac” was published on page 5 of the Monday, October 12 edition, exactly one week after the installment from which the mystery author had cut out the various parts of his card. Avery described the essential facts of the homemade postcard and the two previously unreported letters. Of note, the article contained one slight inaccuracy in that it characterized the torture fantasy from the Mikado Letter as a description of what the killer would do to his victims before murdering them, instead of what he would do to them when they became his slaves in the afterlife.

5.11 The Halloween Card— October 27, 1970

With the arrival of the Crackproof Card, the killer had written to the *Chronicle* six times between the end of April and the beginning of October. The public had not always been immediately aware of the writings, and the reporting had not always been complete and accurate. Nevertheless, this time frame represented the latter of two especially prolific periods of the killer’s writing—the first having been from July to December 1969.

The fugitive from justice would soon go silent for several months. But before he did, he had one more communication left to send. It was a puzzling piece of correspondence that many consider to be the most enigmatic communiqué in an impressive collection of enigmas crafted at the hands of the killer.

For the third time in just under a year, the unknown subject sent a greeting card. He again mailed the correspondence to the offices of the *Chronicle*, but this time instead of addressing it to the editor, as had been his standard practice, he addressed it to a specific person, Paul Avery—the man who had authored the vast majority of the Zodiac articles. The name was slightly misspelled, almost certainly deliberately, as “Paul Averly.” But the intended recipient was undeniably obvious.

The theme of the card, shown in Figure 5.16, was Halloween. The front showed a skeleton next to the following text:

*From Your Secret Pal
I feel it in my bones,
You ache to know my name.
And so I'll clue you in...*

On the inside, the prose continued:

*...But, then, why spoil the game!
Happy Halloween!*

To this basic card, the unknown author made several additions. On the front, the killer wrote the number “14” onto the right hand of the skeleton—undoubtedly an updated reference to the killer’s self-proclaimed victim count. In what may be viewed as a strange act of modesty, the killer also cut out a paper pumpkin and glued it over the groin area of the skeleton.

On the inside, the killer continued his embellishment by pasting a completely new skeleton over the right side of the card. Additionally, he wrote “4-TEEN” over the skeleton and the word “BOO!” in the middle of the card. On the bottom-right side of the card, the author wrote a strange symbol that he had not used in any of his previous letters. The symbol looked a bit like a “V” formed by two lines intersecting at a right angle. Additionally, the killer added a few more lines and carefully annotated four dots in a seemingly meaningful way. To the right of the symbol was the letter “Z.” To the right of that, the killer drew his ever-present Zodiac symbol.

By FIRE SLAVES BY KNIFE
 PAR DICE
 BY GUN BY ROPE

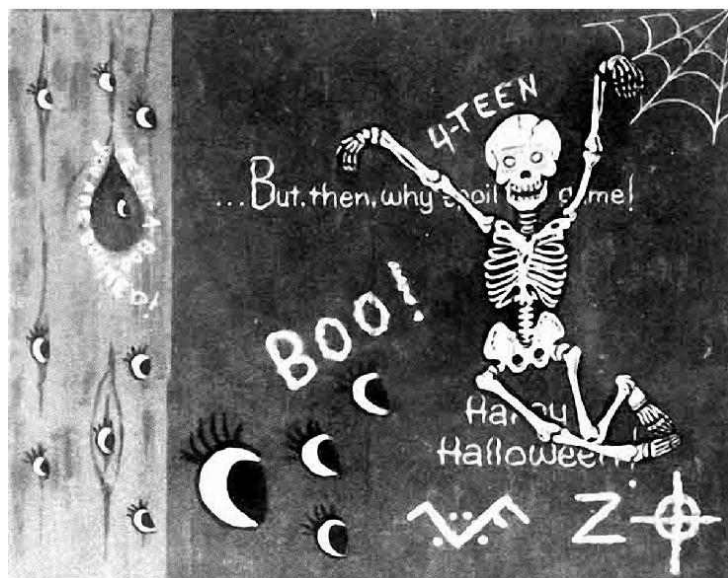
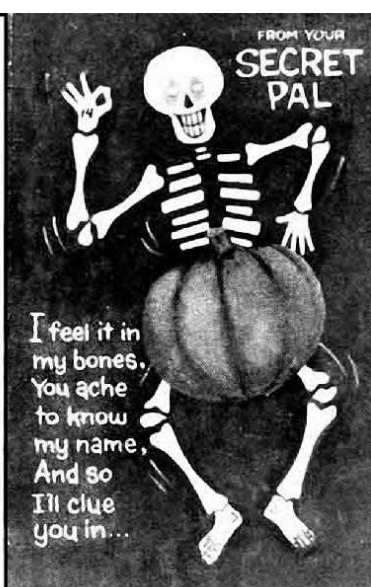




Figure 5.16: The back, front, and inside of the Zodiac's Halloween Card.

On the left side of the Halloween card, the killer carefully drew 13 eyes. Around one of the eyes, he wrote: “Peek-A-Boo You Are Doomed!”

Perhaps the most intriguing content on this particular piece of Zodiac correspondence, however, was the writing on the otherwise blank back of the card. Here the killer had segmented the area into four quadrants by writing the word “PARADICE” down the center of the card and the word “SLAVES” across the middle. The intersection of the two words shared the common letter A. In each of the resulting four sections, the killer wrote a single phrase. Starting from the upper left and going clockwise, the phrases were: “By FIRE,” “By GUN,” “By ROPE,” and “By KNIFE.”

The envelope in which the card had arrived was noteworthy in two additional respects beyond the fact that it was addressed to Paul Avery. First, the strange symbol that the killer had drawn at the bottom of the card was used again in the return-address area of the envelope. Below the symbol, he placed another capital “Z,” presumably for “Zodiac.” Also, interestingly, on the inside of the envelope, the killer had written the phrase “sorry no cipher” two times in yet another instance of two lines intersecting to form a cross.

The meaning of the killer writing “14” on the front of the card and yet only drawing thirteen eyes was unclear. Was the skeleton, which was effectively labeled “4-TEEN” intended to symbolize the fourteenth victim? Or did the author intend something else?

San Francisco detectives and, more personally, Paul Avery agreed on one aspect of the card: the phrase “you are doomed” was intended to be a death threat directed at the card’s recipient. Inspectors William Armstrong and David Toschi went so far as to say there was “no question” about the interpretation of the card. Paul Avery explained his thoughts on the matter, commenting: “It looks like Zodiac has gotten sore at some of the things I have written about him.” He further downplayed the seriousness of the perceived threat, saying: “I consider the ‘you are doomed’ to be... a lot of talk.”¹⁶

True to form, the *Chronicle* published a story detailing the arrival of the latest letter from the Zodiac, appropriately enough, on Halloween. However, unlike all the stories from the previous ten months that the *Chronicle* had published about the killer, the editors once again deemed the news worthy of the front page.

To provide some comic relief in the wake of the ominous Halloween Card, somebody at the *Chronicle* had buttons made that read “I am not Paul Avery.” Several members of the staff, including Paul Avery himself, wore the buttons for a brief time. In some sense,

the Zodiac finally got his precious buttons, even if only indirectly and only at the *Chronicle*. More seriously, Avery also applied for and received a permit to carry a concealed weapon, which he did. But soon after, the requisite change in personal behavior seemed to outweigh the likelihood that the killer would actually pursue Avery with the intent to murder, and so he discontinued carrying the weapon.

Notes

1. “Rode with Zodiac, Woman Claims,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 23, 1970, 4.
2. “Bullets in Bomb That Killed Sgt. McDonnell,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 23, 1970, 4.
3. Jim Herron Zamora, “Plaque Honors Slain Police Officer / Eight Others Injured in Bomb Attack That Killed Sergeant in 1970,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 17, 2007, Accessed November 25, 2020, <http://zodiacrevisited.com/book/sfc-2007-02-17>.
4. Ambrose, “Standard Crime Report: Case No. 70-7475,” March 23, 1970, 6.
5. Paul Avery, “New Evidence in Zodiac Killings,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 16, 1970, 1.
6. Johns, Kathleen, interview by Johnny Smith and Howard Davis, “H. J. N. Terprises, Inc.,” January 1, 1998, audio recording.
7. “Woman Says Zodiac Killer Captured Her,” *The Modesto Bee*, March 23, 1970, A-1.
8. Paul Avery, “Zodiac Sends New Letter—Claims Ten,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 22, 1970, 1.
9. Don Branning, “‘Zodiac’ Boasts of 10 Killings,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 22, 1970, 18.
10. Paul Avery, “New Zodiac Threat—

11. Bizarre Twist,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 1, 1970, 8.
“Richard Phillip ‘Rich’ Radetich,” June 7, 2009, Accessed November 25, 2020, <http://zodiacrevisited.com/book/findagrave-radetich>.
12. “Mystery Gunman Kills S.F. Officer,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 20, 1970, 1.
13. Paul Avery, “Zodiac Says He Killed S.F. Officer,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 30, 1970, 3.
14. San Francisco Police Department Crime Laboratory to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, July 31, 1970.
15. *Zodiac, Extortion, OO: Sacramento*, Internal Correspondence (Airtel), July 31, 1970.
16. “Zodiac Halloween Threat,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 31, 1970, 1.

Chapter 6

Discovering the Past

Whereof what's past is prologue...

Antoine from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

The Zodiac's decision to mail the Halloween Card to Paul Avery personally seemed meaningful; albeit there is room for disagreement as to how we should interpret the meaning. Putting that question aside, the development was important in at least one other regard. News of Paul Avery's receipt of the card was disseminated across the country through standard wire services. One such article in a Southern California newspaper prompted a man to write to Avery anonymously. This person had been trying to persuade the police department in Riverside—a city in the Greater Los Angeles area—that a four-year-old homicide of a young coed at the local community college was related to the Zodiac crimes happening in the Bay Area. Unsatisfied with the response he was getting from law enforcement, the man concluded that Avery might well be more responsive. Indeed, he was.

6.1 Cheri Jo Bates— October 30, 1966

As the fall semester started in 1966, Riverside resident Cheri Jo Bates was the type of person whom many people could find reason to envy. At just eighteen years old, her blonde hair, blue eyes, and slender build made her naturally attractive. Moreover, having been a cheerleader and otherwise active in high school, she was a well-known and well-liked young woman who had a substantial collection of friends, although some described her as a bit shy. But, beyond these important youthful measures of physical beauty and popularity, Cheri was also a thoughtful, studious, and responsible young adult. She took her academics seriously, and she held down a part-time job to pay for her expenses, not the least of which was her prized possession: a lime-green Volkswagen Beetle.

The prior year had been a time of significant adjustment in the Bates' home. Living arrangements that had recently included all four members of the family underwent changes that reduced the household to just Cheri and her father Joseph Bates. The marriage between Joseph and his wife had evolved to the point of separation—Cheri's mother had moved out and taken up residence elsewhere in Riverside.

Meanwhile, Cheri's older brother, Michael, enlisted in the US Navy and soon left to pursue that chapter of his life.

Apart from these domestic changes, Cheri was also grappling with adjustments of the more typical sort. In late spring of 1966, she graduated from Ramona High School. Soon after, she enrolled in Riverside City College, often referred to as simply RCC. In the fall she began attending classes as a freshman.

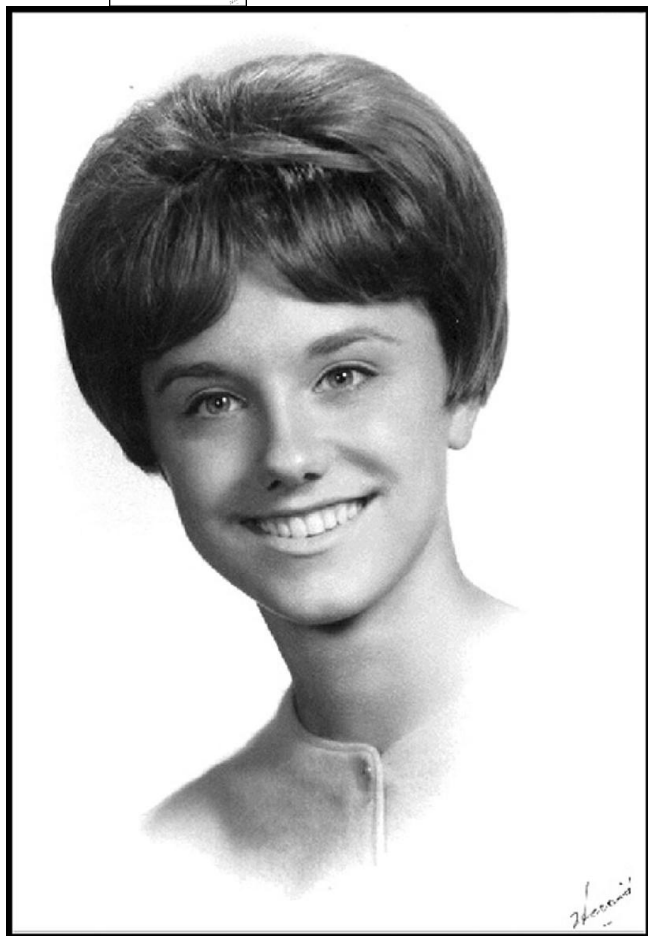


Figure 6.1: A senior portrait of Cheri Jo Bates taken a year before her death. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

Despite the challenges facing Cheri and her father, all indications suggest they were getting along well and existing happily. A friend of Cheri's later described the father-daughter relationship by noting that "she was so close to her father and his life revolved around her."¹

October 30, 1966, must have started like many other Sundays—nothing seems to have been especially notable. Joseph had decided to spend the day at the beach, a common Southern California destination. By roughly 10:00 a.m., he was ready to go. But before setting out, the father talked with his daughter, who was listening to music on a record player. She told him her plans involved staying home and studying, although she allowed for the possibility that she might run to the library to get some books.

Joseph said good-bye and went on his way. Unbeknownst to him, he would never again see his daughter alive.

Little is known about the specifics of how Cheri spent her time between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on the last day of her life. Presumably, she continued to listen to music for some time and eventually turned her attention to studying, as she said she would.

At approximately 3:00 p.m. and again at 3:45 p.m., Cheri called her close friend Stefani whom she asked to accompany her to the RCC library "to pick up a few books."² However, Stefani was unable to join her. A short while later, sometime between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m., friends of Cheri's drove past the Bates' house and observed Cheri's distinctive vehicle still parked in her driveway.

In 1966, the RCC library had unusual Sunday hours of operation in that it was open from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. and again from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. In other words, the library was closed during the 5 o'clock hour. Another friend thought she saw Cheri heading toward campus in her Volkswagen around 6:15 p.m.³

Four fellow students* who knew Cheri entered the library at about 7:15 p.m. and stayed until closing. None of the four saw Cheri at any point during their time in the library. But at least one of the four had noticed her easily recognizable car parked on Terracina Drive, just outside the library.^{2,4}

In fact, no one interviewed by police could say, definitively, that he or she had seen Cheri in or around the RCC library on the night of her murder. The closest anyone came to confirming Cheri's presence was an unnamed male librarian who said he "thought he saw" Cheri during the Sunday-evening session. Unfortunately, he couldn't provide an exact time.⁴

Despite the lack of eyewitness corroboration, the fact that Cheri was in the RCC library at some point on that fateful Sunday was certain. On the passenger seat of her car, police found a notebook and three books on American government. RCC library staff confirmed

that the books had indeed been checked out sometime on Sunday.³

Based on the totality of the evidence, Riverside Police eventually concluded that Cheri had been in the library shortly after it reopened for the evening session at 6:00 p.m.

Joseph returned home from the beach to find an empty house and a note that simply said: “Dad—Went to RCC Library.” By 7:00 p.m., he began to grow concerned and telephoned Cheri’s friend Stefani to ask if she knew of Cheri’s whereabouts. Undoubtedly, Stefani told Joseph of her previous conversations with Cheri about the trip to the RCC library. As time went by and Cheri failed to return home, Joseph became increasingly concerned and eventually filed a missing person report with the Riverside Police Department.

At 6:30 a.m. on October 31, 1966—Halloween—Cleophus Martin, a groundskeeper at RCC, was performing his normal duties by operating a street sweeper on Terracina Drive. As he passed the driveway between addresses 3680 and 3682, something caught his eye. Further investigation revealed the lifeless body of a young woman. It was Cheri.

The Riverside Police arrived on the scene and quickly began cordoning off the area. RCC students showing up for class and, more disturbingly, young students en route to a nearby middle school, had already begun to stop and take notice of the gruesome scene.

In short order, Riverside Police were able to piece together a mostly complete picture of what had happened. Cheri probably arrived at the library sometime shortly after it reopened. She parked her car along Terracina Drive, where police would later find it, and proceeded inside. Once inside, Cheri secured the three books for which she had made the trip. Sometime thereafter she left the library and returned to her car.

While inside the library, an unknown man approached Cheri’s lime-green Volkswagen and, without attracting the attention of anybody, gained access to the engine compartment in the rear of the vehicle. He proceeded to disable the car by tampering with the condenser and distributor—notably, disconnecting the middle wire from the distributor. The perpetrator then closed the engine compartment and chose a nearby location from where he could watch events unfold.

Cheri soon returned to her beloved Volkswagen, placed her books and notebook on the passenger seat, and tried to start the car. Of course, it would not start. But the car was disabled in such a way that attempts to start the vehicle resulted in the engine sounding as if it might start—in other words, it did not sound hopeless.

After Cheri had made multiple unsuccessful attempts at starting her car, the murderer apparently approached Cheri and offered to

help. Police discovered greasy palm prints and fingerprints on the interior of the driver's-side door, clearly indicating that the man had feigned diagnosing the problem and trying to start the car.

The details of what happened next are considerably less certain. What we know is that Cheri left the proximity of her car—presumably at the suggestion of the man and probably under the pretext that he could provide additional assistance through other means such as giving Cheri a ride or providing her access to a telephone. The apparent destination of the two was the location where Cheri's body would later be found, a dirt driveway between two abandoned houses recently purchased by RCC, about seventy-five yards from her vehicle.

The next known investigative data point is as much as four hours later. Police interviews of potential witnesses in the area of the crime scene revealed that several residents at a nearby apartment complex heard a woman screaming. One resident in particular described what she heard as “an awful scream” followed by “a muted scream.” Then, about two minutes later, she heard “a loud sound like an old car being started up.”² Using the available information, police estimated the time of these screams to be 10:30 p.m. Sadly, none of the people who had heard the screams called the police to report them.

The analysis of the crime scene, which started shortly after the discovery of Cheri's body, yielded additional clues. Of particular note, the area around her body made it obvious that Cheri did not lose her life without a fight. One of the investigating detectives, Dick Yonkers, described the dirt driveway where Cheri's body was found by saying that it “... was so churned up it looked like a tractor had been over the ground.”⁵ Furthermore, Dr. F. Rene Modglin, a pathologist in the Riverside County Coroner's Office, found debris, thought to be human skin and hair, under Cheri's fingernails. As police described it: “There is a strong possibility that Miss Bates scratched and clawed her murderer in the struggle for her life.”⁶ Later analysis of these scrapings revealed Cheri's killer to be a white male.⁷

Cheri's body was discovered facedown on the dirt driveway. She'd been beaten and stabbed multiple times. Police identified the young woman using papers from her purse, which was underneath her body. Ten feet away, investigators found another potentially valuable clue in the form of a paint-spattered men's Timex wristwatch with a black band that had been ripped off one side.⁸ The discovery seemed to suggest that the murderer had been wearing the watch and that Cheri managed to rip it off the killer's wrist during the struggle for her life. Dried blood droplets on the driveway made it clear that Cheri's murderer walked back toward Terracina after committing the murder.

Notably missing from the crime scene and surrounding areas was the murder weapon. Police made numerous attempts to find it,

including a thorough sweep of the area with metal detectors. All such searches failed.

Dr. Modglin began the autopsy of Cheri's body around 11:00 a.m. on Monday. His analysis revealed that Cheri's throat had been slashed in three different places. The fatal blow had severed the victim's jugular vein and voice box. Additionally, she had stab wounds to her chest and back and cuts on her face.

The autopsy provided police with information about the physical characteristics of the murder weapon. The knife had been small. The blade was about a half-inch wide and three and a half inches long. Some suggested it may have been a pocketknife.

At the time of Cheri's death, the town of Riverside had no unsolved murders on its books. Consequently, the various arms of city and county government were especially committed to the task of bringing Cheri's murderer to justice. In addition to the Riverside Police Department, the District Attorney's office and Coroner's office participated in the investigative activities.

On Tuesday morning, Captain Irvin Cross, head of the Riverside Police Detective Bureau, held his usual staff meeting. However, the message he had for those in his employ was anything but usual. "You will drop everything else you are engaged in and work full-time on this case until it is solved," were his exact words.⁴ The entire Riverside community was similarly motivated to see the perpetrator of this particularly heinous crime brought to justice. The California Highway Patrol, Los Angeles law enforcement agencies, Riverside Sheriff's Office, and other nearby police departments all volunteered the use of their respective man power and investigative resources.

In just a little more than a day after the discovery of Cheri's body, Riverside Police had interviewed seventy-five people. By the fourth day of the investigation that number had grown to nearly 200. Yet for all the detective work, very little additional information had been procured since that first day.

In an impressive display of investigative creativity and community cooperation, Riverside Police arranged for a real-time reenactment of the events at the RCC library on the night of Cheri's murder. Two weeks after the killing, sixty-five people whom police had identified as being in or around the RCC library were asked to show up wearing the same clothes and re-create their actions—as accurately as possible—from the evening of October 30. At the same time, police cordoned off a large section of the campus such that participants in the reenactment were the only people in the proximity of the library.

Investigators gleaned two curious observations from the results of the reenactment. First, police could account for all people except for one. Participants reported having seen "a heavysset man with a beard"

on the evening of October 30.⁹ Whoever this person was, he apparently did not take part in the reenactment. Second, some participants also reported seeing a “1947–1952 model Studebaker with light-colored, oxidized paint” parked just off Terracina Drive sometime near 7:00 p.m.¹⁰

As is the characteristic with so many of the crimes that are woven into the fabric of the Zodiac case, an initial hope for a quick and definitive resolution to Cheri’s murder slowly, but undeniably, began to fade as time slipped by.

In 1966, Riverside’s local newspaper was the *Press–Enterprise*. In Riverside, the morning edition was known as *The Press*, while the evening edition was *The Enterprise*. Similar to San Francisco’s two main newspapers, the two joined forces for the *Sunday Press–Enterprise*.

As the one-month anniversary of Cheri’s slaying approached, a staff writer at the *Press–Enterprise* began to prepare a retrospective article reviewing the facts and status of the case. Apparently driven by a similar desire to commemorate the anniversary, Cheri’s murderer was busy writing a composition of his own. As fate would have it, the two pieces would be published together.

Late in the day on November 30, Riverside postal authorities discovered two similar, unstamped letters. In both cases, the author had addressed the envelopes using a black felt-tip pen and writing in all capital letters. The first was sent to “Homicide Detail, Riverside,” the intended recipient of the second was the “Riverside Press.” The contents of the two envelopes were identical. Both contained a letter, typewritten in all capital letters, entitled “THE CONFESSION.” In order to defeat forensic analysis, the author did not send the original, but rather a “fourth or fifth” carbon copy. The letter was difficult to read and the evidentiary value of the typewriter characteristics was considerably diminished. The paper on which the author had typed the letter was described as “plain white paper of poor quality.” Interestingly, the width of the paper was eight inches, but the length of the paper was unknown because the author had torn off the unused portions along the top and bottom.¹¹ In a move clearly intended to taunt law enforcement and the public, the author took anonymous credit for the letter by typing the word “BY” followed by 19 underscores, just below the title. An image of The Confession is shown in Figure 6.2, the content read as follows.

THE CONFESSION

BY _____

SHE WAS YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL. BUT NOW SHE IS BATTERED AND DEAD.
SHE IS NOT THE FIRST AND SHE WILL NOT BE THE LAST. I LAY AWAKE

NIGHTS THINKING ABOUT MY NEXT VICTIM. MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE BEAUTIFUL BLOND THAT BABYSITS NEAR THE LITTLE STORE AND WALKS DOWN THE DARK ALLEY EACH EVENING ABOUT SEVEN. OR MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE SHAPELY BLUE EYED BROWNETT THAT SAID NO WHEN I ASKED HER FOR A DATE IN HIGH SCHOOL. BUT MAYBE IT WILL NOT BE EITHER. BUT I SHALL CUT OFF HER FEMALE PARTS AND DEPOSIT THEM FOR THE WHOLE CITY TO SEE. SO DON'T MAKE IT TO EASY FOR ME. KEEP YOUR SISTERS, DAUGHTERS, AND WIVES OFF THE STREETS AND ALLEYS. MISS BATES WAS STUPID. SHE WENT TO THE SLAUGHTER LIKE A LAMB. SHE DID NOT PUT UP A STRUGGLE. BUT I DID. IT WAS A BALL. I FIRST PULLED THE MIDDLE WIRE FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR. THEN I WAITED FOR HER IN THE LIBRARY AND FOLLOWED HER OUT AFTER ABOUT TWO MINUTES. THE BATTERY MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT DEAD BY THEN I THEN OFFERED TO HELP. SHE WAS THEN VERY WILLING TO TALK WITH ME. I TOLD HER THAT MY CAR WAS DOWN THE STREET AND THAT I WOULD GIVE HER A LIFT HOME. WHEN WE WERE AWAY FROM THE LIBRARY WALKING, I SAID IT WAS ABOUT TIME. SHE ASKED ME ``ABOUT TIME FOR WHAT''. I SAID IT WAS ABOUT TIME FOR HER TO DIE. I GRABBED HER AROUND THE NECK WITH MY HAND OVER HER MOUTH AND MY OTHER HAND WITH A SMALL KNIFE AT HER THROAT. HE WENT VERY WILLINGLY, HER BREAST FELT VERY WARM AND FIRM UNDER MY HANDS, BUT ONLY ONE THING WAS ON MY MIND. MAKING HER PAY FOR THE BRUSH OFFS THAT SHE HAD GIVEN ME DURING THE YEARS PRIOR. SHE DIED HARD. SHE SQUIRMED AND SHOOK AS I CHOAKED HER, AND HER LIPS TWICED. SHE LET OUT A SCREAM ONCE AND I KICKER HER HEAD TO SHUT HER UP. I PLUNGED THE KNIFE INTO HER AND IT BROKE. I THEN FINISHED THE JOB BY CUTTING HER THROAT. I AM NOT SICK. I AM INSANE. BUT THAT WILL NOT STOP THE GAME. THIS LETTER SHOULD BE PUBLISHED FOR ALL TO READ IT. IT JUST MIGHT SAVE THAT GIRL IN THE ALLEY. BUT THAT'S UP TO YOU. IT WILL BE ON YOUR CONSCIENCE, NOT MINE. YES I DID MAKE THAT CALL TO YOU ALSO. IT WAS JUST A WARNING. BEWARE...I AM STALKING YOU GIRLS NOW.

CC. CHIEF OF POLICE
ENTERPRISE

In the carbon-copy notation at the end of the letter, "Enterprise" referred to the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, the local newspaper. Initially, the similar listing of "Chief of Police" led law enforcement to believe that a copy was sent specifically to L. T. Kinkead, the Riverside Chief of Police. But as time passed and no additional copies of the letter turned up, police interpreted the "Chief of Police" phrase to be referring to the copy that had been addressed to the "Homicide Detail."

THE CONFESSION

BY _____

SHE WAS YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL. BUT NOW SHE IS BATTERED AND DEAD. SHE IS NOT THE FIRST AND SHE WILL NOT BE THE LAST. I LAY AWAKE NIGHTS THINKING ABOUT MY NEXT VICTIM. MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE BEAUTIFUL BLOND THAT BABYSITS NEAR THE LITTLE STORE AND WALKS DOWN THE DARK ALLEY EACH EVENING ABOUT SEVEN. OR MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE SHAPELY BLUE EYED BROWNNETT THAT SAID NO WHEN I ASKED HER FOR A DATE IN HIGH SCHOOL. BUT MAYBE IT WILL NOT BE EITHER. BUT I SHALL CUT OFF HER FEMALE PARTS AND DEPOSIT THEM FOR THE WHOLE CITY TO SEE. SO DON'T MAKE IT TO EASY FOR ME. KEEP YOUR SISTERS, DAUGHTERS, AND WIVES OFF THE STREETS AND ALLEYS. MISS BATES WAS STUPID. SHE WENT TO THE SLAUGHTER LIKE A LAMB. SHE DID NOT PUT UP A STRUGGLE. BUT I DID. IT WAS A BALL. I FIRST PULLED THE MIDDLE WIRE FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR. THEN I WAITED FOR HER IN THE LIBRARY AND FOLLOWED HER OUT AFTER ABOUT TWO MINUTS. THE BATTERY MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT DEAD BY THEN I THEN OFFERED TO HELP. SHE WAS THEN VERY WILLING TO TALK WITH ME. I TOLD HER THAT MY CAR WAS DOWN THE STREET AND THAT I WOULD GIVE HER A LIFT HOME. WHEN WE WERE AWAY FROM THE LIBRARY WALKING, I SAID IT WAS ABOUT TIME. SHE ASKED ME "ABOUT TIME FOR WHAT". I SAID IT WAS ABOUT TIME FOR HER TO DIE. I GRABBED HER AROUND THE NECK WITH MY HAND OVER HER MOUTH AND MY OTHER HAND WITH A SMALL KNIFE AT HER THROAT. SHE WENT VERY WILLINGLY. HER BREAST FELT VERY WARM AND FIRM UNDER MY HANDS, BUT ONLY ONE THING WAS ON MY MIND. MAKING HER PAY FOR THE BRUSH OFFS THAT SHE HAD GIVEN ME DURING THE YEARS PRIOR. SHE DIED HARD. SHE SQUIRMED AND SHOOK AS I CHOKED HER, AND HER LIPS TWICED. SHE LET OUT A SCREAM ONCE AND I KICKED HER HEAD TO SHUT HER UP. I PLUNGED THE KNIFE INTO HER AND IT BROKE. I THEN FINISHED THE JOB BY CUTTING HER THROAT. I AM NOT SICK. I AM INSANE. BUT THAT WILL NOT STOP THE GAME. THIS LETTER SHOULD BE PUBLISHED FOR ALL TO READ IT. IT JUST MIGHT SAVE THAT GIRL IN THE ALLEY. BUT THAT'S UP TO YOU. IT WILL BE ON YOUR CONSCIENCE. NOT MINE. YES I DID MAKE THAT CALL TO YOU ALSO. IT WAS JUST A WARNING. BEWARE...I AM STALKING YOUR GIRLS NOW.

CC. CHIEF OF POLICE
ENTERPRISE

THE CONFESSION

SHE WAS YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL. BUT NOW SHE IS B THE FIRST AND SHE WILL NOT BE THE LAST. I LA NEXT VICTIM. MAYBE SHE WILL BE THE BEAUTIFUL LITTLE STORE AND WALKS DOWN THE DARK, ALLEY EAC SHE WILL BE THE SHAPELY BLUE EYED BROWNETT THA A DATE IN HIGH SCHOOL. BUT MAYBE IT WILL NOT OFF HER FEMALE PARTS AND DEPOSIT THEM FOR THE IT TO EASY FOR ME. KEEP YOUR SISTERS, DAUGHTE AND ALLEYS. MISS BATES WAS STUPID. SHE WENT DID NOT PUT UP A STRUGGLE. BUT I DID. IT WAS WIRE FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR. THEN I WAITED FOR H HER OUT AFTER ABOUT TWO MINUTS. THE BATTERY MU I THEN OFFERED TO HELP. SHE WAS THEN VERY WILL THAT MY CAR WAS DOWN THE STREET AND THAT I WOU WERE AWAY FROM THE LIBRARY WALKING, I SAID IT "ABOUT TIME FOR WHAT". I SAID IT WAS ABOUT TIM AROUND THE NECK WITH MY HAND OVER HER MOUTH AN KNIFE AT HER THROAT. SHE WENT VERY WILLINGLY. FIRM UNDER MY HANDS, BUT ONLY ONE THING WAS ON BRUSH OFFS THAT SHE HAD GIVEN ME DURING THE YE SQUIRMED AND SHOOK AS I CHOKED HER, AND HER L ONCE AND I KICKED HER HEAD TO SHUT HER UP. I P BROKE. I THEN FINISHED THE JOB BY CUTTING HER INSANE. BUT THAT WILL NOT STOP THE GAME. THIS ALL TO READ IT. IT JUST MIGHT SAVE THAT GIRL I YOU. IT WILL BE ON YOUR CONSCIENCE. NOT MINE. ALSO. IT WAS JUST A WARNING. BEWARE...I AM STA

CC. CHIEF OF POLICE
ENTERPRISE

Figure 6.2: A cropped image of The Confession. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

Police initiated a thorough review of all the details that had been published about Cheri's murder. Although multiple accounts had mentioned that the distributor coil and condenser had been torn out, no reports had included any mention of the perpetrator pulling out the

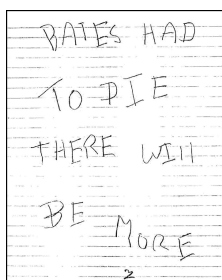
middle wire of the distributor—which was, in fact, true. Though police publicly allowed for the possibility that the letter may have been written by someone other than the murderer, the reality was that they knew the author and the killer were one and the same.¹² The Chief of Police would later privately describe his conclusion on the matter by saying: “There is no doubt that the person who wrote the confession letter is our homicide suspect.”¹¹

As of the writing of this book, the murder of Cheri Jo Bates remains unsolved.

6.2 The Riverside Connection

Just over four years after the murder of Cheri Jo Bates, *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Paul Avery ventured more than 400 miles south to Riverside to learn about the possible connection between the young woman’s death and the unapprehended serial killer who continued to threaten the Bay Area. Through interactions with the Riverside Police Department and other relevant people, he pieced together a thorough understanding of the homicide. Although the RPD had already developed an interest in a local suspect for Cheri’s murder and, hence, discounted the possibility that there was any connection, they, nevertheless, were cooperative and gave Avery considerable access to the case evidence.

Some of the evidence that had not been made public in the aftermath of Cheri’s murder seemed important to Avery. First, there was a trio of short anonymous letters that had been mailed so as to be postmarked on April 30, 1967—the six-month anniversary of Cheri’s murder. The recipients of these letters had been: the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, the Riverside Police Department, and Cheri’s father Joseph Bates. All three had been written on student notebook paper and were essentially the same. One of the letters is shown in Figure 6.3.



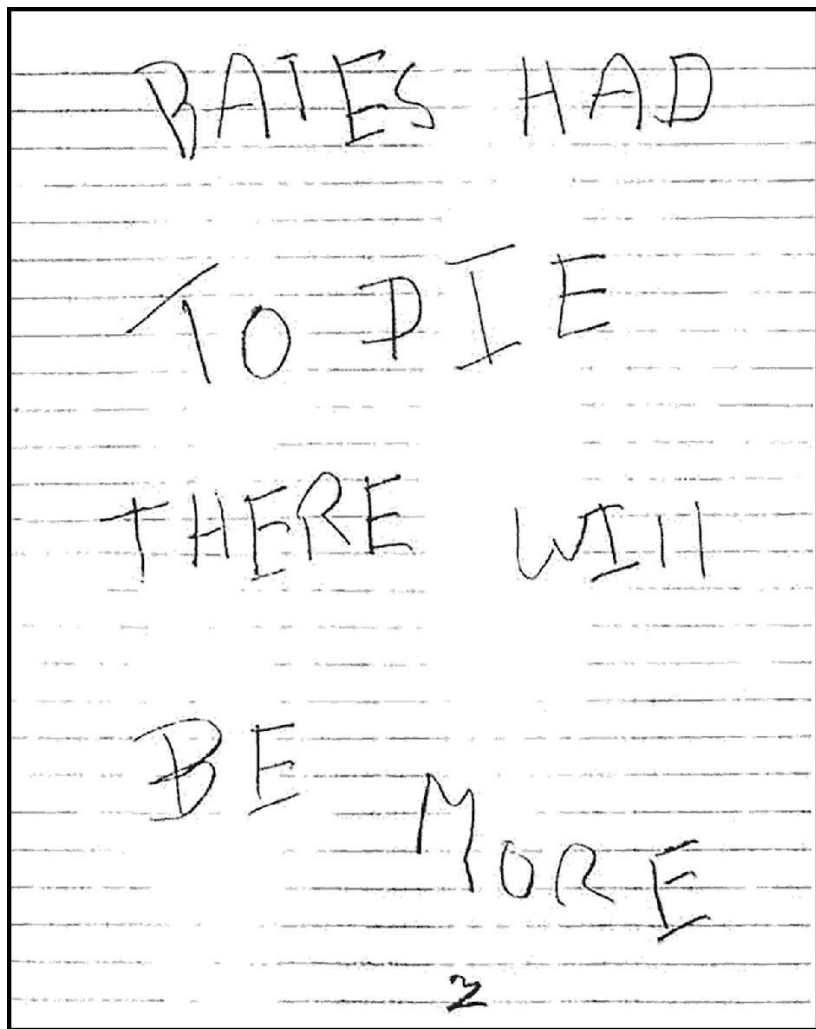


Figure 6.3: One of three anonymous letters sent on the six-month anniversary of Cheri Jo Bates's death. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

Only the letter to Joseph Bates was slightly different in that the word “BATES” had been changed to “SHE.” More interestingly, the other two letters were signed with a symbol that looked like the letter “Z” with a squiggle in the top horizontal line. The obvious question raised by the symbol was: did it have anything to do with the Zodiac persona?

Beyond the letters, RCC personnel had also discovered a disturbing poem that had been written—really etched—with a ballpoint pen onto a student desk that was in storage. The timing of related events suggested that the desk had been defaced sometime shortly after Cheri's murder. The actual desktop is shown in Figure 6.5 while the

poem itself is shown in Figure 6.4.

Sick of living/unwilling to die

*cut.
clean.
if red.
clean.
blood spurting,
 dripping,
 spilling,
all over her new
dress.
oh well.
it was red
anyway.
life draining into an
uncertain death.
she won't
die.
this time
Someone ll find her.
just wait till
next time.*

rh

Figure 6.4: The poem *Sick of living / unwilling to die*, written on an RCC desk near the time of Cheri's murder

On first consideration, the signature of "rh" seemed like a potentially valuable clue. Of course, there were no guarantees that whoever had authored the poem used his actual initials. Regardless, the RPD and others made substantial efforts to identify the author based on people whose name would be abbreviated as "RH." This avenue of investigation yielded no results of value.

Sick of living/unwilling to die
cut.
clean.
if red /
clean.
blood spurting,
dripping,
spilling;
all over her new
dress.
Oh well,
it was red
anyway.
Life draining into an
uncertain death.
she won't
die
this time
Someone'll find her.
Just wait till
next time.
rh

Sick of living/unwilling to die

cut.
clean.
if red /
clean.
blood spurting,
dripping,
spilling;

all over her new
dress.
Oh well,
it was red
anyway.
Life draining into an
uncertain death.
she won't
die.

this time
Someone'll find her.
Just wait till
next time.

rh

Figure 6.5: A picture of the actual RCC desktop showing the poem. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

Avery was not an expert in forensic document examination. Nevertheless, in his lay opinion he felt the distinctive hand printing from the envelopes of the letters and the desktop poem looked similar to some of the Zodiac's writing. After conversations with all the relevant people, Avery convinced the Riverside Police to forward the handwriting evidence to the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation in Sacramento, where Sherwood Morrill—the state's top document examiner and the man most involved with authenticating the Zodiac letters—could analyze it. After receiving the evidence and examining it for four days, Morrill publicly reported his assessment: "The handprinting scratched on the desk is the same as on the three letters, particularly like that on the envelopes, and this handprinting is by the same person who has been preparing the Zodiac letters that have been received by The Chronicle."¹³ Later evaluations by other examiners, including those at the FBI, were less conclusive.¹⁴ But Morrill's opinion on the matter was clear.

The fruits of Avery's labors were three articles that appeared in the *Chronicle* over the course of four days.^{13,15,16} The first was a lengthy front-page story that documented the murder of Cheri Jo Bates and described its possible connection to the Zodiac.¹⁵ The article included the envelope postmarked April 30, 1967 from the Riverside *Press-Enterprise* alongside an example of a Zodiac envelope—specifically, the envelope from the Dripping Pen Card.

Avery also used the opportunity afforded by this first article to report on an interview he had done with possible Zodiac abductee Kathleen Johns. By this time, it had been nearly eight months since Kathleen's ordeal. Nevertheless, Avery had managed to track down the young mother and extract a detailed account of what had happened to her on that fateful night in March. Hence, this single article not only broke the news about a possible connection between the Zodiac and a four-year-old homicide in Riverside, it also provided extensive details about Kathleen's abduction. There was a lot of information for the public to absorb.

The second *Chronicle* article reported on Morrill's professional assessment of the Riverside evidence and its relationship to the Zodiac case.¹³ Perhaps understandably, Avery was particularly aggressive in characterizing the possible connection; the headline read "Zodiac Link Is Definite." Of course, many San Franciscans formed their opinions about the Zodiac and Riverside based on Avery's writing and, hence, they often agreed with his conclusions. Yet it's also fair to say that some remained skeptical of the possibility—most notably, the Riverside Police Department. Over the years—with the Zodiac case remaining unresolved and suggested alternatives becoming more

varied—the number of skeptics has continued to grow.

Notes

1. Tom Green, “Students React to Campus Murder with Attitude of Shocked Calm,” *The Press*, November 2, 1966, D1.
2. “RCC Coed, 18, Slain on Campus,” *The Press*, October 31, 1966, A1.
3. Anne B. Jennings, “Police Still Tracing Coed’s Last Activities,” *The Press*, November 6, 1966, B1.
4. John Montgomery, “Leads Are Few in Search for Knife-Killer of Coed,” *The Press*, November 1, 1966, B1.
5. “Detectives Dig Deep into Cheri Bates’ Background,” *The Press*, November 8, 1966, C2.
6. “Key Clue Goes to CIC Unit,” *The Press*, November 3, 1966, B1.
7. “Police Say Facts Show Killer Is a White Male,” *The Press*, November 7, 1966, C2.
8. Robert Graysmith, *Zodiac Unmasked: The Identity of America’s Most Elusive Serial Killer Revealed*, New York: Berkley Books, 2002, p. 82.
9. “Police File 352-481 Gets Thicker; Cheri Bates Murder Case Month Old,” *The Press*, November 30, 1966, B1.
10. “Police Send Murder Confession Letter to State’s Crime Experts,” *The Press*, December 1, 1966, B1.
11. L. T. Kinkead of the Riverside Police Department to Earl Randol of the Napa County Sheriff’s Office, Voigt, Tom, October 20, 1969, p. 2, Accessed November 25, 2020, <http://zodiacrevisited.com/book/zk-riverside-memo-2>.
12. Jack Mathews, “After Six Months

- Coed's Murder Remains Puzzle to Detectives," *The Press*, April 30, 1967, B4.
13. Paul Avery, "Zodiac Link Is Definite," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 17, 1970, 2.
14. *Zodiac, Extortion*, Report of the FBI Laboratory: File No. 9-49911, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington D.C., May 2, 1974.
15. Paul Avery, "New Evidence in Zodiac Killings," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 16, 1970, 1.
16. Paul Avery, "Police Confer on Zodiac Killings," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 19, 1970, 2.

Chapter 7

Fading Away

The opportunity to secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, circa 500 BCE

Similar to how the Zodiac wrote prolifically from August to December of 1969 only to fall silent for four months, the killer, after writing consistently between April and October of 1970, again stopped communicating. This time around, the self-imposed silence lasted four and a half months.

In fact, as the mystery author had done multiple times in the past, he wrote two letters in quick succession. As with every letter that eventually made its way into the capable hands of law enforcement, each held the promise and potential of containing the clue that would crack the case wide open and lead investigators to the man responsible for the crimes. But what investigators did not know—what they could not know—was that their opportunities for obtaining additional direct evidence from the killer were nearing an end.

7.1 The *Los Angeles Times* Letter— March 13, 1971

Sometime on Saturday, March 13, 1971, the killer made his way to Pleasanton, California, a town about forty minutes east of San Francisco, and discreetly dropped a letter into a public mailbox. For the first time, the Zodiac was writing to a newspaper that was not in the Bay Area. Instead, his recipient of choice was the *Los Angeles Times*, the preeminent Southern California newspaper, probably owing to the speculation that he was responsible for the murder of Cheri Jo Bates.

*This is the Zodiac speaking
Like I have always said
I am crack proof. If the
Blue Meannies are ever
going to catch me, the had
best get off their fat asses*

+ do something. Because the
longer they fiddle + fart
around, the more slaves
I will collect for my after
life. I do have to give them
credit for stumbling across
my riverside activity, but
they are only finding the
easy ones, there are a hell
of a lot more down there.
The reason that Im writing
to the Times is this, They
don't bury me on the back pages
like some of the others.

SFPD – 0 – 17 +

Figure 7.1: The *Los Angeles Times* Letter, March 13, 1971

Document examiner John J. Harris analyzed the letter and quickly concluded that it was, in fact, legitimately from the Zodiac. Both the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on the arrival of the letter in their respective March 16 editions. Ironically, the *Chronicle* put the story on page 1 whereas the *Times* relegated it to page 3. Additionally, the two papers also reported the full contents of the letter, except for the following phrases which were apparently omitted in the interest of journalistic standards: “fat asses” and “+ fart.” The *Times* showed an image of the first part of the letter. The *Chronicle*, on the other hand, published a full picture of the letter with the censored phrases crossed out.

7.2 The Peek Through the Pines Card

March 22, 1971

Though the Zodiac had broken his long-standing pattern of writing exclusively to the *Chronicle*, he would not neglect the newspaper for long. In the days after the news of the *Los Angeles Times* Letter, the killer began work on his next communiqué. For this piece of correspondence, he followed a theme similar to the homemade postcard from the previous October. But instead of using an index card, he used a blank, four-cent postcard purchased from the post office.

To the postcard the killer affixed an image of a ski village nestled in the woods. The author had taken the image from an advertisement

for a newly opened condominium community known as Forest Pines, located in Incline Village, Nevada, just over the California border on the northern shore of Lake Tahoe. Although the advertisement had been published in multiple Northern California newspapers, the killer had almost certainly cut it out of the *Chronicle*; the paper had published the advertisement on page 37 of its March 19 edition.

The unknown author returned to a previously established behavior by once again employing a hole punch, this time completely scalloping the edges of the card. Additionally, he cut out or pieced together several phrases from different newspapers, which he also affixed to the postcard. These phrases included "Sought victim 12," "Peek through the pines," "pass Lake Tahoe areas," "Sierra Club," and "around in the snow." The latter phrase had been positioned upside down, again creating a similarity to the postcard from October of the previous year. Finally, the killer wrote his ever-present Zodiac symbol in the lower right corner.

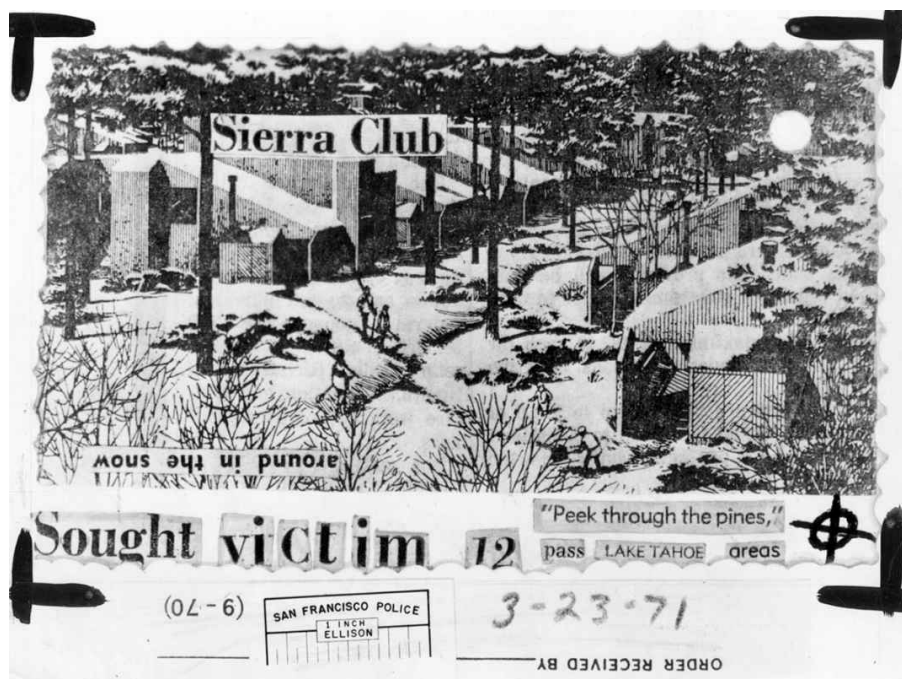




Figure 7.2: The Peek Through the Pines Card. Image reproduced with permission from the *San Francisco Chronicle* / Polaris.

The author had taken the “Peek through the pines” phrase and the words “Lake Tahoe” from the same advertisement that contained the main image. The *Examiner* reported that the words “Sierra Club” had come from its newspaper.¹ The origins of the other words are unclear, although they probably came from some combination of Bay Area

newspapers or possibly the *Los Angeles Times*.

On the address side of the postcard, the killer used a hole punch to place a hole in the return-address area. He then fashioned a Zodiac symbol around the hole. As a final touch, he wrote the word “Zodiac” above the symbol. For the address itself, the killer cut out the names of three different newspapers: “The Times” (Los Angeles), “The S.F. Examiner,” and “San Francisco Chronicle.” The meaning of this address was ambiguous; but, to clarify his intention, the killer added the following phrase at the bottom of the postcard: “att. Paul Averly = Chronicle.” The misspelling of Avery’s name was consistent with the Halloween card that had been addressed to him five months earlier.

After creating his masterpiece, the killer followed his standard pattern of behavior by mailing the correspondence from somewhere in San Francisco, probably on March 21 or 22. On Monday, March 22, an observant postal inspector took notice of the suspicious postcard and recognized it for what it was: a communication from the Zodiac. The inspector delivered the cryptic postcard to the *Chronicle* on Monday evening.

Predictably, the staff of the *Chronicle* turned the postcard over to the SFPD. Soon after, Sherwood Morrill examined the correspondence. Because most of the words had been cut from newspapers, there was little actual handwriting to analyze. Nevertheless, given what there was, Morrill concluded that the words “conform and are consistent with all other [Zodiac] writings I have examined.”²

Inspectors Armstrong and Toschi turned their attention to the task of interpreting the meaning of the cryptic postcard. Looking into potential Zodiac victims in the Lake Tahoe area immediately identified a likely possibility. A nurse named Donna Lass disappeared under unusual circumstances. She had been employed by the Sahara Hotel and Casino in South Lake Tahoe and was last seen sometime around 2:00 a.m., the end of her shift, on September 6, 1970.

7.3 Donna Lass— September 6, 1970

Donna Lass was born and raised in the small town of Beresford, South Dakota. After graduating from the local high school in 1962, she attended the St. Joseph Mercy School of Nursing in Sioux City, Iowa. By the summer of 1965, Donna had graduated from the nursing program, satisfied all licensing requirements, and earned the designation of Registered Nurse.

Over the course of the next four years, Donna worked in a handful of nursing positions, first in Minnesota and later in California. In February 1970, she accepted a position as a Staff Nurse at Letterman

General Hospital on the Presidio Army post—coincidentally the same army post where the Zodiac had evaded capture following the murder of Paul Stine. After a short few months, Donna decided to move to Lake Tahoe—the alpine lake area that straddles the California-Nevada border known for its beautiful scenery and numerous ski resorts, including Squaw Valley, the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics—and take a job as a nurse at one of the popular casinos. According to a friend, Donna’s plan was to ski through the winter and save money for a trip to Europe.³ Sadly, fate would intervene before she had the chance to do either.

While Donna had worked at Letterman General Hospital, she shared an apartment with a coworker named Jo Anne. The two young women stayed in touch after Donna moved to South Lake Tahoe. On September 3, Jo Anne spoke with Donna via telephone. During that conversation Donna and Jo Anne solidified arrangements for Jo Anne to visit over Labor Day weekend. Rather than worry about the complexities of directions to Donna’s new apartment, the two planned to meet at her place of employment—the Sahara Hotel and Casino—after Donna’s 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. shift.





Figure 7.3: A picture of Donna Lass. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

When Jo Anne arrived at the Sahara, Donna was nowhere to be found. Jo Anne waited and inquired with the people whom she could think to ask. Not having Donna's phone number and otherwise not knowing what to do, she eventually spent the night in a nearby motel. On Sunday morning, she resumed looking for her friend, again to no avail. On Sunday night, confused and unsure of what else to do, she returned to San Francisco.

Sometime during the day on Sunday, September 6, both the Sahara Hotel and Donna's landlord received a phone call from an unidentified man who claimed to be relaying a message on behalf of the young nurse. The man said Donna had been forced to leave unexpectedly owing to an emergency illness in her family.

Initially, little was made of Donna's disappearance. The circumstances were unusual, but there appeared to be a reasonable explanation. As time passed, however, and she continued to miss work, the staff at the Sahara eventually reported her disappearance to South Lake Tahoe Police. Additionally, Donna's boss at the Sahara contacted the Lass family in Beresford, South Dakota. Donna's mother immediately and unequivocally denied the claim that a family emergency had been responsible for Donna leaving Lake Tahoe.

Donna's family instantly knew something was gravely wrong. Not

only had somebody intentionally made a false claim of a family emergency, but a disappearance such as this was completely out of character for Donna. She was a dependable young woman who took her responsibilities as a nurse seriously. In the words of her sister, Mary Pilker, “She would never take off on her own like that.”³

South Lake Tahoe Police searched Donna’s apartment and found it in an exceptionally clean condition. In particular, there were no indications of a struggle. The only items not accounted for were one outfit of clothing, presumably the one she was wearing the night of her disappearance, and her purse. Additionally, Donna’s convertible sports car, a 1968 Chevrolet Camaro, was discovered near her apartment. The car was locked and showed no unusual signs of disturbance.

With few leads, police made little progress. On September 26, nearly three weeks after Donna was last seen, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a story on page 3 detailing the young nurse’s disappearance from the resort area some 200 miles northeast of the City by the Bay.³ Attempting to do everything in their power, the Lass family hired a private investigator and eventually incurred nearly \$5,000 in expenses; yet, substantive information about what happened to Donna remained elusive. Underscoring the starkness of the reality, Donna’s mother explained: “we have always felt she was murdered.”² Sadly, the ensuing decades have yielded nothing to suggest otherwise.

7.4 The Sound of Silence

Between the combination of his crimes and his communications, the man who called himself the Zodiac had been moved to the point of action on at least twenty different occasions between December 1968 and March 1971. In his wake, at least five people were dead, two had recovered from life-threatening injuries, and an untold number of friends and family members of the victims had suffered irreparable harm. In addition, much of the Bay Area population had been victimized by the killer’s unique brand of domestic terrorism and hundreds of members of law enforcement had contributed to an impressive effort that ultimately failed to achieve its goal.

Throughout this time frame, the killer himself had been evolving. In the fall of 1969, at the height of his impact, the Zodiac had been defined primarily by the act of murder. In the two weeks from September 27 to October 11, the man had killed three people. From December 1969 through March 1971, the killer may have continued to engage in the act of murder or attempted murder, but nothing could be definitively linked to him. To be sure, the people of the Bay Area never discounted the fact that the Zodiac was a cold-blooded

killer. But, at the same time, the fugitive's more recent bizarre and enigmatic communications began to overshadow his previous crimes.

Regardless of what labels we might apply to the man, after sending the Peek Through the Pines Card in March 1971, the killer did what few expected... He went silent.

Notes

1. "Zodiac Card Hints Slaying in Sierra," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 26, 1971, 3.
2. Paul Avery, "Zodiac Hints of a Body Near Tahoe," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 26, 1971, 1.
3. "Nurse Vanishes—A Tahoe Mystery," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 26, 1970, 3.

Chapter 8

Looking Backward

A great part of courage is the courage of having done the thing before.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American philosopher, 1803–1882

With the Zodiac no longer communicating, the various investigations charged with apprehending the fugitive moved forward but at a painfully slow pace. Meaningful developments were few and far between. One of these developments, however, was the realization that the killer's Lake Berryessa attack bore a number of eerie similarities to an unsolved double murder that had happened more than six years earlier and roughly 300 miles to the south.

Circumstantial evidence had led many people to believe that the man who was the Zodiac had killed Cheri Jo Bates in Riverside. With this more recent revelation, additional evidence suggested that he may have committed another pair of homicides near Santa Barbara, again in Southern California. Moreover, investigators of this latter crime suspected that the perpetrator may have also killed a couple in San Diego eight months later.

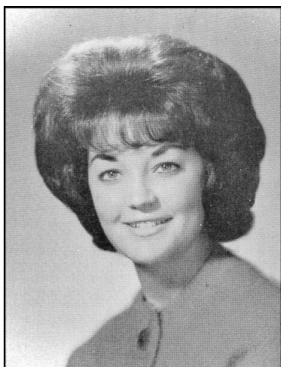
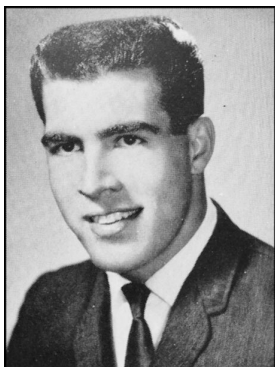
In the *Los Angeles Times* Letter, the Zodiac wrote: "... they are only finding the easy ones, there are a hell of a lot more down there." Perhaps this statement was something more than just simple braggadocio. Some people who were knowledgeable about the case were beginning to consider the possibility that the fugitive was already a serial killer by the time he arrived in the Bay Area.

8.1 Robert Domingos and Linda Edwards

June 4, 1963

It was a different time. John F. Kennedy was living out the final chapters of his short but extraordinary presidency—in just six months' time he'd be dead, felled by the bullets of an assassin. American moviegoers were introduced to Ian Fleming's superspy, James Bond, by way of the franchise's first installment, *Dr. No*. On the small screen, the archaically quirky situation comedy *The Beverly Hillbillies* was perched comfortably atop the ratings hierarchy. Internationally, the Soviet Union was preparing to launch the first woman into space,

cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova. Meanwhile, back in the United States, the South was slowly and painfully making progress on the issue of civil rights. While imprisoned for leading a nonviolent resistance campaign against racial segregation, Martin Luther King, Jr. penned the now-famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." In three months' time he'd stand at a podium on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and proclaim "I Have a Dream." More generally, World War II and the Korean Conflict were not some distant, abstract subjects, but rather real, substantive memories impacting many lives in tangible ways. And ominously, for those of us here in the future who have the benefit of knowing what happened, the first seeds of the distasteful fruit that would become America's involvement in Vietnam were just beginning to germinate.



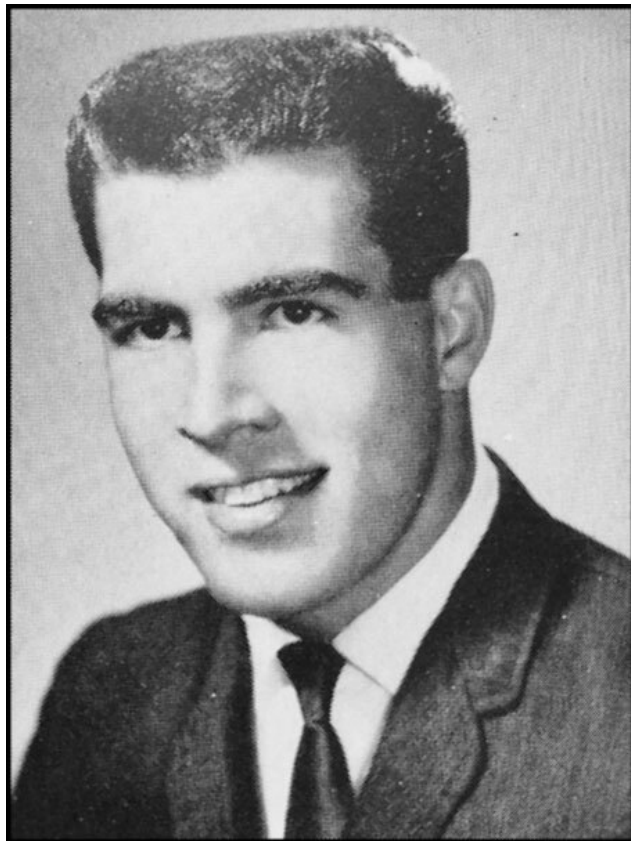


Figure 8.1: 1963 Lompoc High School yearbook photographs of Robert Domingos and Linda Edwards. Images courtesy of the Lompoc Valley Historical Society.

As spring turned to summer in 1963, Robert Domingos and Linda Edwards were the embodiment of high-school sweethearts. Both were seniors at Lompoc High School in the town of Lompoc, California, about an hour northwest of Santa Barbara. Robert had played varsity football and served as vice president of the Future Farmers of America organization for two consecutive years. Linda had relocated with her family from Colorado a few years earlier and quickly adjusted well to her new surroundings.

With graduation fast approaching, the couple was looking forward to embarking on the next segment of their shared journey. Robert had secured a position with the Richfield Oil Company, and the two were planning to marry in a small wedding that November. But these were glimpses of a future that was not meant to be.

At the time, it was a rite of passage for every Lompoc High School graduating senior to participate in “Ditch Day,” a designated day just shy of graduation on which seniors did not attend class but instead

participated in some type of fun-filled activity. The school administration was not only aware of Ditch Day, they endorsed it and helped the students plan and organize the official Ditch Day activity, which became a school-sanctioned event. In 1963, school officials designated Tuesday, June 4 as Ditch Day. The graduating class voted on possible activities and collectively chose to go to Santa Barbara Beach.

Of course, not everyone who participated in Ditch Day did so through the school-sanctioned event. In particular, Robert and Linda decided not to go to Santa Barbara Beach. Linda described the decision of the graduating class in a letter to a friend, stating: "They can have it, as far as I'm concerned."¹ School officials would later confirm that the couple was not on the official Ditch Day list and did not board the bus bound for Santa Barbara Beach.

Instead, Robert and Linda made plans to enjoy the beautiful spring day in the company of another couple, a friend named Shirley and her boyfriend. However, circumstances later changed and Shirley's boyfriend was required to work on that particular day. Robert and Linda tried to convince Shirley to come along anyway, but she declined, probably not wanting to feel like a third wheel.

Sometime after noon on June 4, Robert and Linda embarked on their own unofficial Ditch Day activity. The couple's destination was a secluded beach area off coastal Highway 101. This particular spot near Gaviota was known to local Lompoc teenagers as a popular place to swim and surf. Access to the waterfront was limited in that the ocean side of the road primarily consisted of coastal cliffs. Visitors were required to park their cars in a small area on the median of Highway 101 and trek down to the ocean by way of a long and winding path, which is precisely what the young couple did.

When Robert and Linda failed to return home by Wednesday morning, their families became concerned. By early afternoon it was clear something was seriously wrong. The Domingos family contacted the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and reported the couple missing. The time recorded on the report was 2:36 p.m.²

Robert's father, Hutch, continued looking for the couple, enlisting the help of two family friends, a father and son. By Wednesday evening, the three-person search team decided to head out to the popular beach location that, unbeknownst to them, had been Robert and Linda's destination. Just before 9:00 p.m., the three found the 1957 Pontiac that Robert had been driving. A thicket concealed the car's location from the view of passersby on Highway 101. The doors were locked, yet Linda's purse and some other items belonging to the couple were clearly visible.

With daylight fading fast, Hutch and the two family friends left to

find the closest phone, which was at a nearby store. Hutch called the Highway Patrol, and a short time later, Officer Paul Shults arrived.

Together, the four descended to the beach in darkness and began the task of searching for the missing couple. At approximately 10:00 p.m., they came across a crudely built shack. Officer Shults instructed the others to stay back and then approached.

Inside the shack, the patrolman's flashlight revealed the bullet-riddled, lifeless bodies of Robert and Linda.³ Officer Shults advised the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office of the situation and shortly thereafter a contingency of law enforcement professionals arrived and secured the crime scene.

The county fire department helped to transport the bodies to the local mortuary. Autopsies were performed almost immediately. The findings indicated that the couple had been murdered on Tuesday. Robert had been shot eleven times, Linda eight. In both cases, the assailant had used a .22-caliber weapon.

On June 6, the day after the bodies of Robert and Linda were found, the commencement ceremony for the Lompoc High School's graduating class went forward as planned amid an atmosphere of somber confusion brought on by the fate of the two popular classmates. The following day, Friday, June 7—what would have been Linda's eighteenth birthday—Robert was laid to rest. Linda's parents scheduled her funeral service for the following Monday, likely to avoid burying their beloved daughter on her own birthday. Both services were heavily attended.

Using the results of the autopsies and the physical evidence at the crime scene, investigators painted the following picture. Sometime after Robert and Linda arrived at the beach on Tuesday, they were approached by an assailant brandishing a .22-caliber automatic weapon, probably a rifle. The assailant produced some lengths of rope, presumably precut, and instructed Linda to bind Robert.

What happened next is unclear. In the opinions of the original investigators, the most likely scenario was that Robert somehow managed to free himself from his bindings. Perhaps after a brief physical struggle between the assailant and Robert, both victims made a run for it. What is clear is that the assailant quickly responded by shooting both victims in the back. Shell casings and bloodstains indicated that most of the shooting happened near a dried-up creek on the beach. Furthermore, the manner in which some of the bloodstains were distributed indicated that at least one of the victims made significant efforts to flee after sustaining one or more gunshot wounds. Additional shell casings and powder burns on the bodies revealed that, after shooting and incapacitating the victims from some distance away, the killer approached each victim and delivered a final, point-

blank coup de grâce shot. 3,4

Soon after, the killer dragged his victims' lifeless bodies to the shack about twenty feet away.¹ Postmortem bruising indicated that the killer dragged the bodies exactly as they had fallen: Robert facedown and Linda on her back. The shack was extremely small and insufficient to accommodate both bodies side by side, so the killer placed Robert facedown and then stacked Linda faceup on top of him.

Next, the killer cut open the top of Linda's one-piece bathing suit, exposing her breasts. Beyond this curious action, there was no indication of any sexually motivated activity. At some point, the assailant set down four boxes of ammunition inside the shack. He then made one or more unsuccessful attempts to burn down the structure by setting fire to the blanket that served as a makeshift door.

Apparently concluding that there was nothing more to be done, the killer left the scene, notably leaving the boxes of ammunition behind. Investigators speculated that the killer may have been injured during the encounter because one of the subsequent searches of the area revealed bloodstains on some rocks on the path leading to and from the crime scene.¹

As soon as the bodies were discovered, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office initiated an aggressive investigation. In the weeks that followed, numerous suspects were taken into custody, including a seventeen-year-old Lompoc High School classmate,⁵ a seventeen-year-old Sacramento boy who lived with his uncle in Lompoc,⁴ a teenage runaway from Oregon, several boys from Santa Maria,⁶ a sixteen-year-old runaway from Chicago,⁷ and a sixteen-year-old from Orange County.⁸ All were questioned and cleared of involvement in the crime.

A few days before Robert and Linda were gunned down, a sixty-three-year-old Lompoc resident named Vern Smith was murdered near the trailer in which he lived.⁶ Smith had been lured to his death by three teenage boys who pretended that their car had run out of gas and asked Smith for assistance. Smith, being the helpful person he was, accommodated the boys and took them to get gas. Upon their return, the boys repaid the elderly man's kindness by fatally stabbing him in the back and stealing the \$360 that Smith had on him. Soon after, two of the three teenagers were arrested. When questioned by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, they claimed that the actual stabbing had been done by the third young man, a teenager whom they had just recently met and knew only as "Sandy." Detectives from the Sheriff's Office were able to track down some information about Sandy, but they could not locate the teenager. After issuing a statewide APB that included a police sketch done based on input from the two teenagers, a couple of possible matches were investigated, but detectives determined that neither young man was Sandy.^{7,8}

Because of the timing involved with the murders of Vern Smith and the popular Lompoc High School couple, Robert and Linda, some people speculated that the elusive Sandy suspect may have been responsible for both crimes. The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office wanted to do their due diligence and question Sandy about the Gaviota murders—and more importantly, the murder of Vern Smith—but the likelihood that he was actually responsible for the young couple's murders felt low.

With other investigative avenues leading nowhere, law enforcement turned their attention to the strongest evidence: the shell casings and live ammunition found at the scene. The brand and type of ammunition was Winchester-Western Super-X .22 Long Rifle. The evidence at the crime scene clearly indicated that the weapon had been an automatic, but whether it was a pistol or a rifle was uncertain. The Sheriff's Office described the weapon by saying there were “strong indications” that it was a rifle.³

Investigators found a valuable clue by inspecting the four boxes of ammunition left behind by the assailant. The boxes had been stamped with a lot number: TL21. An area-wide check into all known ammunition dealers revealed that only two locations had boxes of ammunition stamped with that particular lot number: the post exchange at Vandenberg Air Force Base and a sporting-goods store in Santa Barbara. Both stores had a process by which they would affix price stickers to each individual box of ammunition sold. However, the two stores differed in terms of how they handled the sale of bricks of the ammunition, in other words ten boxes sold together. The sporting-goods store affixed price stickers to each box of the brick separately, whereas the post exchange often did not. Since each box found at the scene neither had a price sticker nor showed any evidence of ever having had a price sticker, investigators believed there was a strong probability that the ammunition had once been part of a brick that the killer had purchased at the post exchange of Vandenberg AFB.⁷

As the weeks slipped by, suspicion in the case turned to the man who had built and lived in the shack where the bodies of Robert and Linda were discovered. At the time, his whereabouts were unknown and available descriptions were scarce and vague. He was said to have been an ex-military “beachcomber” who dressed in fatigues and wandered the area near the shack with a .22-caliber rifle strapped to his back.

Santa Barbara Sheriff James Webster initiated a statewide manhunt for the suspect, but the response was limited. In August 1964, over a year after the murders, several people reported seeing the beach dweller in Ventura County; nevertheless, police were still unable to

locate him.⁹ Four months later, he was finally apprehended.

On December 1, 1964, a Santa Ana police officer responded to a report that the subject of the manhunt was living in a small plywood hut near some local railroad tracks. This time, the information proved to be correct, and George Edward Gill was taken into custody. The following morning at 6:30 a.m., Santa Barbara detectives drove to Santa Ana and returned with the suspect who was booked into the Santa Barbara County jail.

Gill was a fifty-one-year-old World War II veteran. Apparently, he had been unaware of law enforcement's interest in him. When advised of his right to an attorney, Gill simply responded by saying he didn't need one. For the next three days, members of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and the District Attorney's Office intensively questioned the long-sought person of interest. Gill admitted to building and living in the beach shack. However, he insisted he had nothing to do with the murders, stating that he had left the area a week prior to the slayings, having found work picking oranges on an orchard in Northern California. Gill also denied reports that he had been seen carrying a rifle; he claimed not to have used any firearms since leaving the army. In order to convince investigators of his innocence, Gill agreed to take a lie detector test administered by an investigator from the District Attorney's Office. Additionally, eight deputies from the Sheriff's Office attempted to verify Gill's statements regarding his whereabouts for the previous two years.

After three days of questioning the suspect, Sheriff Webster reported that Gill had been cleared of suspicion in the murders of Robert Domingos and Linda Edwards. "Everything he told us checked out," explained the Sheriff, which included Gill's claim that he had been working in Northern California at the time of the murders.¹⁰ The lie detector test further indicated that Gill was being truthful. Officials described Gill by saying that he "demonstrated complete cooperation."¹¹

The dismissal of Gill as a suspect in the murder of Robert and Linda was a bittersweet moment. On the one hand, the investigation was one step closer to the truth in terms of absolving the mysterious beachcomber of complicity in the crime. But, on the other hand, the best remaining hope for solving the murders turned out to be nothing but a red herring.

In the ensuing years, further developments in the case of the young couple's murders were few. Naturally, the inevitable personnel changes in the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office played out like that of any other law enforcement department. By 1972, a new detective, William Baker, had inherited the case and was spending time in pursuit of its resolution. As one of his first actions, Detective

Baker sent out a statewide APB describing the murders and soliciting information regarding similar crimes.

Two members of law enforcement saw Baker's APB and immediately recognized several points of similarity between the '63 killer and another fugitive from justice. The two officers were Inspector William Armstrong of the San Francisco Police Department and Special Agent Mel Nicolai from the California Department of Justice. The fugitive was, of course, the Zodiac.

In particular, the Zodiac's attacks at Lake Berryessa and on Lake Herman Road bore remarkable similarities to the murder of Robert and Linda. In both the Gaviota and Lake Berryessa cases, an assailant armed with a semiautomatic firearm approached an unknown couple on a shoreline, produced lengths of pre-cut rope, and instructed one to tie up the other at gunpoint. In addition, the Lake Berryessa crime had a connection to the military in that the killer wore wing-walker shoes. The Gaviota murders also had a military connection since investigators believed that the ammunition was likely purchased at Vandenberg AFB. And the ammunition itself, Winchester-Western Super-X .22 Caliber Long Rifle, was the exact type used by the Zodiac in the Lake Herman Road murders.

After meeting with many of the various investigators active in the case of the Zodiac, Detective Baker—who was convinced that his fugitive and the Zodiac were one and the same—drafted a press release in the hopes of goading the killer into some kind of reaction. The press release received considerable attention, but it failed to elicit its desired response.¹² As of the publication of this book, the murders of Robert Domingos and Linda Edwards remain unsolved.

8.2 Johnny Ray Swindle and Joyce Swindle February 5, 1964

It was one of rock and roll's defining moments. The four members of the still-evolving popular music phenomenon known as The Beatles boarded Pan Am Flight 101 in London's Heathrow Airport and, a short while later, emerged in New York City at the recently renamed John F. Kennedy Airport. The date was February 7, 1964. In two days' time, the Fab Four made their first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* with a then-record seventy-three million viewers tuning in to witness the momentous broadcast. One of the contemporary network news reports described the band's arrival as a "British Invasion." The rest, as they say, is history.

Across the country in San Diego, members of the city's police department were preoccupied with a more serious matter. On Wednesday evening, February 5, a "psychopathic killer" had lain in

wait, shot, and killed a lovestruck newlywed couple as they gazed out at the ocean on a beautiful Southern California evening.¹³ There were few clues left behind, and progress was frustratingly slow.

Johnny Ray Swindle was a Radioman Third Class in the US Navy. Originally from Jasper, Alabama, Johnny Ray enlisted in 1960, when he was only seventeen.¹⁴ He went through recruit training and Radioman School in San Diego. Later, in November 1963, he returned to the city after a stint in Kodiak, Alaska, and a deployment aboard a destroyer, the USS *Hanson*.



Figure 8.2: Pictures of Joyce and Johnny Ray swindle published with the

story of their murder in the February 7, 1964 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*. Images were distributed by law enforcement and are in the public domain.

In December, Johnny Ray entered the fourth and final year of his original enlistment. On January 10, 1964, the sailor reenlisted for six more years. In return, he received a bonus of \$976. The young man immediately took his thirty days of accrued leave and returned to Jasper where he made good on a three-year-old promise to marry his longtime sweetheart, Joyce.¹⁵ The two exchanged vows in a small ceremony on January 18. As a wedding gift, they received a 1957 Buick, which the newlyweds drove across the country to San Diego, stopping off briefly in New Orleans to visit one of Johnny Ray's sisters. On January 29, they arrived at their destination.¹⁶

By all accounts, Johnny Ray and Joyce were a quiet couple who kept to themselves. Their landlady, a woman by the name of Maria Smith, knew of no one who had visited the young husband and wife in the week between the time they arrived in San Diego and the night they were gunned down. Investigators were able to interview more people who had known Johnny Ray, concluding that he was a "quiet, inoffensive, likable person, not much of a conversationalist, a typical small-town boy."¹⁷ Three days prior to her death, Joyce wrote a letter to her mother-in-law describing newlywed life. "We do everything together. We live four blocks from the beach and we love the beach and spend a lot of time there. We're a little homesick, but don't worry. Everything's fine."¹⁸

The trip to and from Jasper had left the newlyweds a little short on money, which prompted Johnny Ray to approach Mrs. Smith and ask if there was any work he could do around the apartments in order to earn some cash. Smith agreed to help out the young couple by having him paint the interior of an apartment. This activity consumed the better part of the last day of Johnny Ray's life; he worked until approximately 3:00 p.m., at which point he rejoined his wife in their apartment.¹⁹

Smith later reaffirmed to police what had been evident in Joyce's letter: the new bride was fascinated by the ocean. In the short week that the newlyweds had been in San Diego, they had made it a point to take a walk along the beach each night, sometime between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. On this particular night, they set out right around 7:00 p.m.

The young sailor's leave was drawing to an end, and the newlyweds would soon have to part ways. Johnny Ray had orders to report for duty in a short day and a half, at which time he was scheduled to be transferred to Bremerton, Washington. Of particular note, they would have to spend their first Valentine's Day as husband

and wife away from each other. With this bit of sadness in mind, the couple stopped off at a local drugstore where Johnny Ray bought a box of Valentine candy for his new bride. They continued on to the ocean that Joyce loved, finding a vantage point on the concrete patio of the Silver Spray Apartments. The couple sat on a short retaining wall, set the open box down, and began sharing the candy while taking in the beauty of the nighttime ocean. It was a picture of love and innocence.

The first shot hit Joyce in the upper arm. The next shot entered her back, severed her spine, and instantly paralyzed her. One of the newspaper reports claimed someone heard Johnny Ray screaming “No! No!”¹⁹ The sailor tried to position his body so as to protect his new bride. The gunman, crouched in a makeshift sniper’s nest, turned his deadly attention to the young man. He shot Johnny Ray in the arm and the head. Shell casings at the scene and gunpowder burns on the bodies indicated the assailant then approached and shot each victim one more time at point-blank range—Joyce in the back of the head and Johnny Ray in the left ear. Finally, the killer took Johnny Ray’s wallet and watch and fled the scene.²⁰ Through the establishment of a timeline, police were able to narrow the probable time of attack to a window between 8:10 and 8:15 p.m.

A man named Edward Nelson discovered and reported the victims. He had been walking in the area when he noticed “a shadow or something.” As fate would have it, Nelson had a flashlight, which he shone in the direction of the oddity that had attracted his attention. The light revealed the disturbing scene. According to Nelson: “At first I thought they had been drinking and had passed out—then I saw blood.”²¹ Surprisingly, despite having been shot in the head twice, Johnny Ray was still alive. He was moaning—though not communicating in any discernible way—and attempting to lift himself up. Nelson immediately informed the staff of the Silver Spray Apartments of the situation, who, in turn, called the police. The time was 8:40 p.m.

Officers from the San Diego Police Department quickly arrived on the scene. Sadly, Joyce was already gone. First responders transported Johnny Ray to Doctor’s Hospital, where he put up a serious fight for his life. Unfortunately, he lost that fight at approximately 11:00 p.m.

Daylight on Thursday morning revealed much at the scene of the crime. The sniper’s nest was discovered some fifty feet away from the kill zone. In particular, the police report documented:

The killer was crouched next to a concrete projection above the patio where the victims were standing. He was in total darkness and well hidden from any angle. The patio was

*illuminated enough to make identification of the victims by the killer a possibility and leave no doubt he knew the sex and approximate age of both victims.*²²

In all, officers recovered seven shell casings—five from the sniper's nest and two from the coup de grâce shots delivered at point-blank range. Additionally, two lead smears were found on the retaining wall behind the victims. From this evidence, investigators concluded that the assailant had fired at least seven times, possibly eight, and had struck his victims with six of the shots.

A woman a block and a half away from the shootings witnessed a man running near her residence at “full speed.” She noted the time as 8:16 p.m. Police believed this person was either a witness or possibly the perpetrator himself.¹⁶

Investigators determined the ammunition to be Remington-Peters brand .22 Long Rifle. Further, the bullets were of the hollow-point variety, specifically designed to inflict maximum damage.²³ Later in 1968, based on the FBI's ballistics analysis, then San Diego Chief of Police O. J. Roed said he believed the weapon was a Remington automatic rifle, model 550-1. *

The circumstances surrounding the Swindles' presence in San Diego provided few opportunities for some of the more common homicide motives. Joyce had been in the city all of seven days. Johnny Ray had spent more time in the city, but all accounts indicated that he was a quiet person without an enemy in the world. The fact that the killer stole Johnny Ray's wallet and watch suggested robbery may have been a motive. However, lying in wait and murdering a couple simply to take whatever possessions the man may have on his person felt incongruous. Investigators concluded it was “possible that it was an entirely motiveless murder with robbery either a secondary motive, an afterthought or an attempt to confuse investigating officers.”²⁵

The day after the murders, investigators had gathered enough information for Chief of Police Wesley Sharp to make the following statement: “Everything in the investigation of this double murder points to a psychopathic killer. We need all the help we can get from the public to locate the killer and his weapon.”¹³

The SDPD pressed forward with an intense campaign to find the killer's murder weapon. Nine divers from nearby Coronado Naval Base searched the coastal surf near the crime scene in case the killer had thrown the murder weapon into the ocean.¹⁹ Similarly, the Coast Guard helped out by providing a helicopter to fly a pair of detectives over the nearby areas on the outside chance that the killer had thrown the weapon onto one of the roofs. Additionally, twenty-five detectives

from the SDPD canvassed the neighborhoods near the crime scene, asking residents to turn over any .22-caliber weapons. On the Friday after the murders, forty such weapons were collected.¹⁴ Forensic analysis proved that none of them were the murder weapon.

One person who was paying particular attention to the developments involving the San Diego murders was James Webster, the Santa Barbara County sheriff. After the investigation into the murders of Robert Domingos and Linda Edwards pointed toward a motiveless “stranger murder,” Sheriff Webster had warned other coastal law enforcement agencies that the killer of the young couple might well resurface in another Southern California locality and kill again.¹⁸ When news of the murders in San Diego broke, the similarities were remarkable. In both cases, couples were attacked on a beach by an apparent stranger wielding a .22-caliber automatic weapon. Further, both murders involved the assailant starting out by firing from afar and ending with coup de grâce shots being delivered at point-blank range, close enough to leave powder burns on the bodies.

With the San Diego murders following the Gaviota homicides by just eight months, one can easily see why Sheriff Webster felt the same individual may well be responsible. On the Friday after the San Diego murders, Sheriff Webster dispatched two of his Santa Barbara detectives to San Diego. In addition to being able to advise on the specifics of the Santa Barbara County murders, Detectives Gilbert Chayra and Joseph Rodriguez brought with them a shell casing from the Gaviota crime scene that could be used for ballistics comparison. The analysis showed that the weapons used in the two crimes were different, albeit both were .22-caliber automatics and probably rifles. In fact, the criminologist who did the comparison went further, saying “... both guns apparently were turned out by the same manufacturer.”²⁶ Despite this lack of a weapons match, Sheriff Webster still maintained that “the manner in which both couples were gunned down on the beach without apparent motive indicates that the same killer may have committed both crimes, getting rid of his old rifle after the first crime.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, the San Diego investigation itself seemed to be characterized by much activity but little real progress. Providing some perspective, Detective Inspector O. J. Roed † described the situation by observing: “At this point all we can say is in the Swindle case we have fewer clues to work with than in any other murder case in recent years. All we actually have is two bodies and the seven bullets that killed them.”²⁷

While the investigation pressed forward in the days following the murders, San Diego authorities arranged to have the bodies of Johnny

Ray and Joyce Swindle returned to Jasper, Alabama. Many of the same people who had gathered less than a month earlier to witness the young couple exchange wedding vows returned on February 10, this time to commit the bodies of the newlyweds to the ground. The happiness, hope, and promise of the former juxtaposed with the sadness, confusion, and finality of the latter must have been a difficult burden for the couple's friends and families to bear.

Like so many of the others, the murders of Johnny Ray and Joyce Swindle remain unsolved.

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3. "Investigators Step Up Search for Clues in Slaying of Lompoc High School Pair," *Santa Barbara News-Press*, June 7, 1963, A-1.
4. Barney Brantingham, "Sacramento Youth Cleared in Slaying," *Santa Barbara News-Press*, June 11, 1963, A-1.
5. "Murdered Teen-Ager Buried; Isolated Beach Searched," *Santa Barbara News-Press*, June 8, 1963, A-1.
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7. "VAFB Ammunition Traced in Murder," *Santa Barbara News-Press*, June 18, 1963, B-1.
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 22. Stevens, "Officer Report," 3.
 23. Pliny Castanien, "Double Killing Probe Turns to 7 Bullets," *The San Diego Union*, February 12, 1964, A-19.
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Chapter 9

Reappearing

Every parting gives a foretaste of death, every reunion a hint of the resurrection.

Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher
1788–1860

During most of the Zodiac's campaign of terror, his impact on the public was a direct function of his most recent action, be it an act of murder or the less lethal, though sometimes equally impactful, act of letter writing. The public found itself a reluctant participant in a game where it held very few of the cards. Admittedly, law enforcement was occasionally successful in suppressing information—as was the case with the bus bomb threats—or painting the killer in an unflattering light, but these happenings were also reactionary. In this sense, the entire existence of the Zodiac can be viewed as a repeated pattern of action, reaction, and inaction.

The problem with being on the receiving end of this type of relationship is that when it's done, one can never really be sure that it's over; unless the end is brought about through some type of unambiguous conclusion, which of course, didn't happen in this case.

March 22, 1972, was a special date for San Francisco Inspectors Armstrong and Toschi: it was the one-year anniversary of the then-last communiqué from the Zodiac. Not only was the date important in terms of the milestone that it represented, but it was also significant in that both detectives felt there was a reasonable chance that the killer would choose to commemorate the anniversary by writing again. They reasoned that since the Zodiac had written to Melvin Belli on the anniversary of the Lake Herman Road murders, he might be similarly inclined to write with the passing of the March 22 date. Accordingly, they paid extra attention to their mail on and around the anniversary, keeping an eye out for anything that could have come from the elusive killer.

But the days came and went without incident. Whatever it was that had motivated the Zodiac to refrain from communicating with the people of the Bay Area maintained its grip on the man's psyche. The *Chronicle*, the newspaper that had been the killer's recipient of choice, published a short article on March 26 asking the question: "Where Has Zodiac Gone?"¹ There were no good answers.

The ensuing two years did little to improve the situation. Substantive developments in the case were few and far between.

9.1 The *Exorcist* Letter— January 29, 1974

But the Zodiac was not done, not yet. Nearly three years would pass after the date of his previous correspondence before the killer finally put blue felt-tip pen to paper and, once again, communicated with the people of the Bay Area. This time, he crafted a bizarre, single-page letter using his immediately recognizable hand printing, predictably replete with spelling mistakes. He placed the letter into an envelope, addressed it to “San Fran. Chronicle,” and added the familiar phrase “Please Rush to Editor.” Channeling his warped comedic eccentricity, the killer affixed some non-stamp parts of a stamp booklet alongside a slightly misplaced eight-cent Eisenhower postage stamp.

On Tuesday, January 29, 1974, the killer dropped the envelope into a mailbox. The postmark indicated that he had done so somewhere in either San Mateo or Santa Clara County. The letter, known as the “*Exorcist* Letter”, is shown in [Figure 9.1](#).

I saw + think "The Exorcist" was the best satirical comedy that I have ever seen.

Signed, yours truly :

He plunged him self into
the billowy wave
and an echo arose from
the suicides grave
titwillo titwillo
titwillo

Ps. if I do not see this note in your page-, I will do something nasty, which you know I'm capable of doing

158

Me - 37

SFPD - O

I saw + think "This
was the best sateri
idy that I have ead

Signed, yours + true

He plunged him self
the billowy wave
and an echo arose
the suicides grove
titwillo titwillo
titwillo

Ps. if I do not see
note in your paper
will do something
which you know I'm
doing

11

Figure 9.1: The *Exorcist* Letter, the final communication from the killer

The Exorcist, of course, is a reference to the now-classic horror film based on William Peter Blatty's 1971 novel of the same name. Released the day after Christmas in 1973 and opening in a paltry thirty theaters across the country, the film became a cultural phenomenon en route to earning Blatty an Academy Award for Best Screenplay. It was also the first horror movie ever nominated for Best Picture, and it remains, as of this book's publication, the highest-grossing R-rated film of all time.^{2*}

In today's age of video on demand and seemingly inexhaustible sources of streaming content, it's difficult to put into perspective the cultural dynamics that surrounded *The Exorcist* in early 1974. Well before videocassette recorders (VCRs) became commonplace and four years before the opening of the country's first video rental store, the moviegoing public really had only one reliable way to see a film: by experiencing it in a theater. Once a movie's theatrical run was over, the likelihood of seeing it again was remote. Consequently, when a popular movie was in theaters, many people made a point to go see it.

Interestingly, a little over two weeks before the killer's letter, Paul Avery, the man who had authored most of the *Chronicle's* articles about the Zodiac, wrote a front-page story documenting the phenomenon surrounding *The Exorcist*.³ Entitled "Weird Goings-On At the Movies," Avery recounted how tens of thousands of Bay Area residents had been braving the winter cold to stand in line, sometimes up to two hours, for the chance to see the surprisingly successful horror film. Before venturing into the opinions of a handful of select individuals who were lucky enough to be interviewed for the article, Avery also noted how the film's intensity was regularly resulting in a small percentage of the audience experiencing visceral reactions in the form of either fainting or vomiting. Of course, these occurrences were not unique to San Francisco; they were happening everywhere the movie was being shown and they contributed to the eerie atmosphere that enveloped the film. These were the circumstances that existed when the killer chose to make reference to *The Exorcist*.

For the section beginning "He plunged..." the killer once again returned to the character Ko-Ko from Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado*. This time, he's quoting the song "Willow, Titwillow", wherein Ko-Ko recounts the story of a heartbroken bird who commits suicide.

The closing trademark murder tally had been slightly modified in that the standard Zodiac symbol was replaced with the considerably less ominous "Me." Moreover, by writing the value "37," the killer wanted his readers to believe that he'd murdered an additional twenty people since the "17+" score from the *Los Angeles Times* Letter sent

March 13, 1971, nearly three years earlier. Of course, law enforcement had long ago become suspect of the killer's ongoing score, since there was no evidence to definitely link the Zodiac to any additional homicides, or lesser crimes for that matter.

The Zodiac also included some unusual markings—which resemble Chinese or Japanese characters—at the bottom of the letter. The meaning or symbolism of these markings has never been adequately explained.

The *Chronicle* obliged the killer's demand and published a front-page story documenting the receipt of the long-awaited letter.⁴ The continuation of the story included a reproduction of the missive that lacked the strange markings but was otherwise faithful.

Never again would the killer communicate as the persona of the Zodiac...

9.2 The SLA Postcard— February 14, 1974

The Symbionese Liberation Army, commonly known as the SLA, was a radical left-wing political group that advocated violence, murder, and other crimes in order to further its agenda and finance its activities. Donald “Cinque Mtume” DeFreeze founded the California-based group in 1973. The SLA gained significant notoriety when it kidnapped Patty Hearst—the granddaughter of newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst—from the University of California–Berkeley on February 4, 1974.

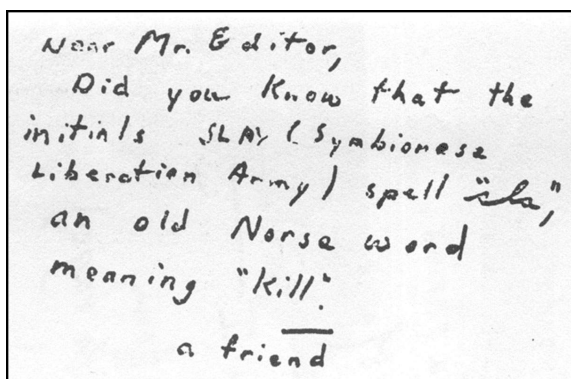
The kidnapping saga turned interesting when it became apparent that Hearst had begun to sympathize with her captors. Later, she became actively involved in the group's criminality, including two bank robberies and other acts of violence.

The SLA was significantly weakened in mid-May, when much of its leadership was killed in a shoot out with Los Angeles police. The remaining members returned to the Bay Area. Hearst managed to evade capture until her luck ran out on September 18, 1975.

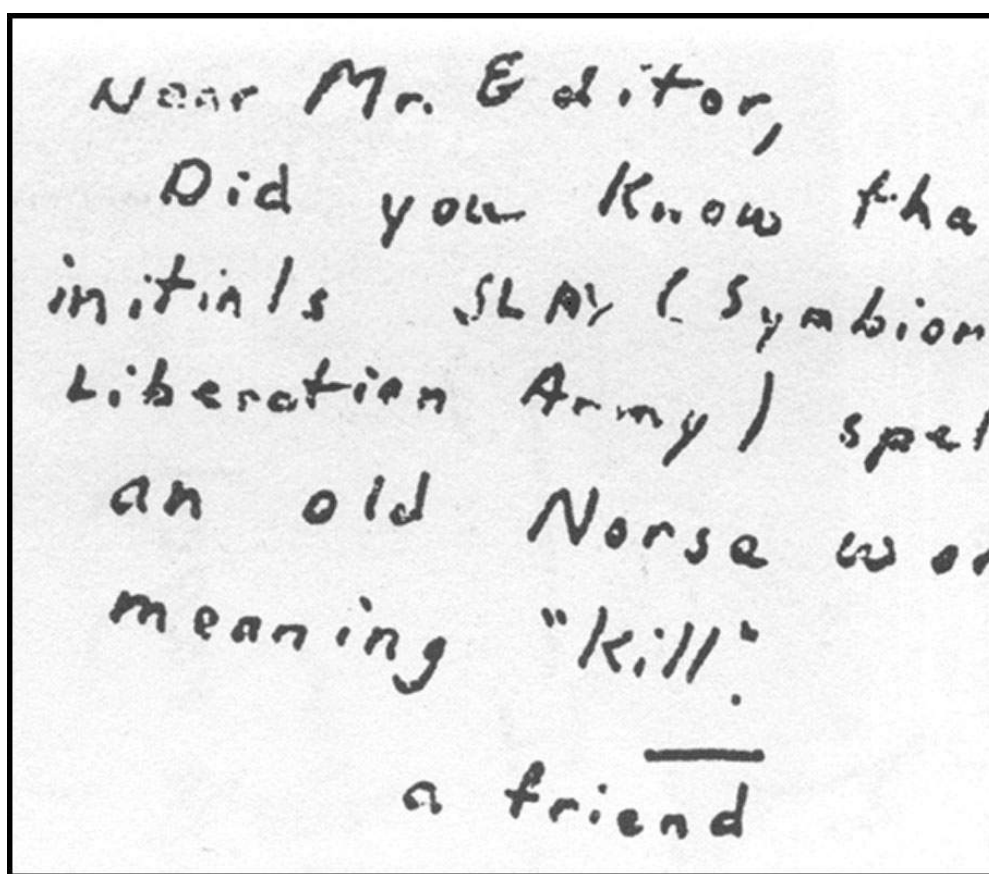
Patty Hearst was tried for her participation in one of the SLA's bank robberies. In an interesting coincidence, F. Lee Bailey defended Hearst. Bailey was the famous criminal defense attorney who had been the Zodiac's first choice as a guest for the morning call-in show *A.M. San Francisco*—assuming that the Zodiac was indeed the man who'd called the Oakland Police Department in October 1969. During the trial, Hearst claimed that she'd been forced to take LSD, had been sexually assaulted, and had endured other psychological trauma. Bailey further argued that his client had acted under the influence of Stockholm Syndrome, the psychological condition whereby a kidnapping victim begins to sympathize with his or her abductors.

On March 20, 1976, after twelve hours of deliberation, a jury found Hearst guilty of armed robbery and the use of a firearm to commit a felony. She was sentenced to seven years in prison. However, after serving less than two years of jail time, President Jimmy Carter commuted her sentence to time served. Eventually, President Bill Clinton pardoned Hearst.

In the aftermath of Hearst's initial kidnapping, at a time when the SLA was heavily in the news, an anonymous person wrote a short note and sent it to the editor of the *Chronicle*, curiously arriving on Valentine's Day. The note is shown in Figure 9.2.



Dear Mr. Editor,
Did you know that the
initials SLA (Symbionese
Liberation Army) spell "sla",
an old Norse word
meaning "kill".
a friend



Dear Mr. Editor,
Did you know the
initials SLA (Symbion
Liberation Army) spell
an old Norse word
meaning "kill".
a friend

Figure 9.2: The SLA Postcard. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

Although not as well documented as the other letters attributed to the killer, many people believe this note is legitimate. The *Chronicle* did not publicly acknowledge the existence of the postcard for two years. Nevertheless, in the professional opinion of a document examiner from the United States Postal Service, the handwriting was a match to the other letters penned at the hand of the Zodiac.^{5,6} As was the case with the Riverside handwriting, the FBI's analysis was more tentative, but it did not rule out the possibility that the postcard was authored by the same individual.⁷

9.3 The Citizen Card— May 8, 1974

The next communiqué that the killer sent to the *Chronicle* was in the form of a postcard that, strangely, had been mailed on May 8, 1974, but not received by the newspaper until June 4. The reason for the delay through the postal system is unknown. The author of this note

wrote as a concerned citizen urging the newspaper to drop a particular advertisement due to its glorification of murder. Known as the “Citizen Card,” the contents are shown in Figure 9.3.

*Sirs - I would like to
expression my consterati
consternation concerning
your poor taste + lack of
sympathy for the public, as
evidenced by your running
of the ads for the movie
“Badlands,” featuring the
blurb “In 1959 most people
were killing time. Kit + Holly
were killing people.” In
light of recent events, this
kind of murder glorification
can only be deplorable at
best (not that glorification of
violence was ever justifiable)
Why don’t you show some
concern for public sensibilities
+ cut the ad?*

A citizen

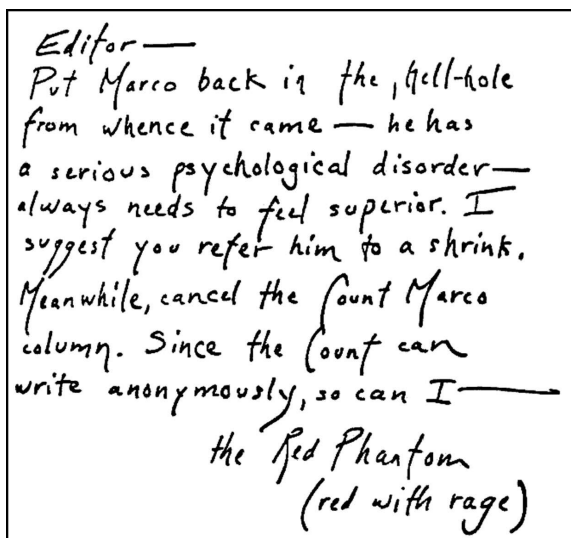
Figure 9.3: The contents of the Citizen Card, May 8, 1974

Badlands was a feature film playing in theaters at that time that starred Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek. It was loosely based on the murder spree of nineteen-year-old Charles Starkweather and his fourteen-year-old girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate, which took place primarily in Nebraska during January 1958.

9.4 The Red Phantom Letter— July 8, 1974

Initially, the existence of the Citizen Card was not disclosed to the public. A short time later, on July 8, 1974, the killer mailed what was likely his final letter, which has come to be known as the “Red Phantom Letter.” The author addressed the letter to the editor of the *Chronicle* and took the opportunity to complain about one of the paper’s columnists, Marc Spinelli, who wrote a “glamour advice” column under the pseudonym Count Marco. The letter had an

exaggerated type of handwriting that was very different from the typical Zodiac letters; in fact, the handwriting was so exaggerated that it gave the distinct impression that the author was likely attempting to disguise his true penmanship. The letter is shown in Figure 9.4.

A handwritten letter on a white background, enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. The handwriting is in black ink and is highly stylized, with exaggerated loops and slurs. The text is written in a cursive-like style. The letter is addressed to an editor and discusses a person named Marco, suggesting a psychological disorder and recommending a referral to a shrink. It also mentions canceling a 'Count Marco' column and states that the writer can write anonymously. The letter is signed 'the Red Phantom' with the note '(red with rage)' in parentheses below the signature.

Editor —
Put Marco back in the hell-hole
from whence it came — he has
a serious psychological disorder —
always needs to feel superior. I
suggest you refer him to a shrink.
Meanwhile, cancel the Count Marco
column. Since the Count can
write anonymously, so can I —
the Red Phantom
(red with rage)

Editor —
Put Marco back in the, he
from whence it came — he
a serious psychological diso
always needs to feel superior
suggest you refer him to a
Meanwhile, cancel the Count M
column. Since the Count ca
write anonymously, so can
the Red Phantom
(red with

Figure 9.4: The Red Phantom Letter, mailed July 8, 1974. Image courtesy of Tom Voigt, zodiackiller.com.

In response, the *Chronicle* immediately published a story on page 2, in which the author described the details of both the Citizen communiqué and the Red Phantom Letter.⁸ The story was accompanied by a reproduction of the Citizen Card. The Red Phantom Letter, on the other hand, was only described textually. In the article, Inspector Toschi explained:

There's no doubt in my mind about either one [of the communications]. I took them to a documents expert and in less than five minutes he told me positively they were in fact written by the Zodiac.

He's trying to slip letters and cards into the Chronicle without being detected. He's not fooling anybody—no matter what his game is.

Once Spinelli came to understand that he had likely garnered the attention of the Bay Area's most notorious murderer, he decided his fifteen-year career at the *Chronicle* was sufficient and soon after moved on to pursue other interests—effectively granting the letter writer his wish.

Notes

1. Baron Muller, "Where Has Zodiac Gone?" *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, March 26, 1972, A3.
2. *Top Lifetime Adjusted Grosses*, Accessed November 25, 2020, <http://zodiacrevisited.com/book/box-office-mojo-2020>.
3. Paul Avery, "Weird Goings-on at the Movies," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 11, 1974, 1.
4. Paul Avery, "Zodiac Mystery Letter—the First Since 1971," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 31, 1974, 1.
5. "Tips Still Pursue Multiple Slayer," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 26, 1976, 3.
6. *Zodiac, Extortion, OO: Sacramento*, Internal Correspondence (Airtel), Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Francisco Field Office, February 28, 1974.
7. *Zodiac, Extortion*, Report of the FBI Laboratory: File No. 9-49911, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington D.C., March 8, 1974.

8. Duffy Jennings, "Zodiac's Letters to the Editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 10, 1974, 2.

Chapter 10

Suffering Distractions

A distracted existence leads us to no goal.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
German author and playwright, 1749–1832

In all likelihood, the man who had been the Zodiac stopped contributing to the evidence that might one day identify him when he mailed the Red Phantom Letter to the *Chronicle* in July 1974. He likely dropped the letter into a public mailbox and walked away, never to be heard from again.* Whatever inner demons had compelled the man to the point of action on so many prior occasions apparently no longer maintained their grip on his psyche. If law enforcement was to solve the case of the Zodiac, they had reached the point where they would have to do so without the benefit of additional help from the fugitive himself.

The late 1960s had become the mid-1970s. With few significant developments in the case, the people of the Bay Area turned their attention to the ever-present continuum of pressing issues: Vietnam, Watergate, an oil crisis, the fight for women's rights, continued advancements in space exploration, as well as the more mundane array of everyday happenings. Concern about a one-time serial killer who appeared to no longer be threatening anyone must have felt misplaced, even if the man did continue to remain at large.

A notable exception to the lack of developments in the case happened in April 1975 when the *Chronicle* published an article describing a shocking theory in which Sonoma County Sheriff Don Striepeke suggested that the Zodiac was responsible for the murder of thirty to forty young women in California and four other western states.¹ These murders included six young women in Sonoma County in what has come to be known as the Santa Rosa Hitchhiker Murders. Detectives involved with the Zodiac investigation quickly discounted the possibility that their killer was linked to the murders of these women. Amid the clamorous media fallout of the initial reports, Striepeke was forced to clarify his position, explaining: "I never said it was Zodiac. We just never ruled out the possibility. It could be Zodiac, and it could not be."²

As of the time of this book's publication, the Santa Rosa Hitchhiker murders remain unsolved. Few people, however, believe that the man

who was the Zodiac had anything to do with the crimes.

In 1976, San Francisco Inspector William Armstrong, the senior partner in the two-man team most associated with law enforcement's hunt for the serial killer, abruptly retired from the Homicide Division. The remaining half of the partnership, David Toschi, became the sole officer in the San Francisco Police Department charged with the task of bringing the Zodiac to justice.

As 1977 turned to 1978—the ten-year anniversary of the Zodiac's first known murders—the story of the serial killer had one more significant chapter yet to be written. Unfortunately, no good would come of this next set of developments. By the time events played out, serious doubts as to the integrity of the Zodiac investigation would be raised. Ultimately, all doubts would be dismissed as unsubstantiated to the satisfaction of most objective observers. But not before the existence of the doubts had corroded the public's perception of the entire case.

10.1 The “I Am Back With You” Letter

April 24, 1978

On Tuesday, April 25, 1978, the *Chronicle* received what appeared to be its first communication from the Zodiac in more than four years. The letter, with its instantly recognizable handwriting and the author's signature use of a blue felt-tip pen, seemed to indicate that the killer was once again compelled to communicate with law enforcement, the *Chronicle*, and, more generally, the people of the Bay Area. Many people—law enforcement professionals and otherwise—felt the killer might one day break his silence, so the arrival of such a letter was not wholly unexpected.

The envelope was postmarked on Monday, predictably in San Francisco. Following standard procedures, the *Chronicle* turned the letter over to the SFPD. The letter's content is shown in Figure 10.1.

Unlike previous Zodiac letters, this missive called out specific people by name. Herb Caen was a popular columnist for the *Chronicle*, and, of course, “toschi” was Inspector David Toschi, the man who had been hunting the killer for nine years.

Toschi began the task of attempting to authenticate the letter on the basis of handwriting. He employed the services of John Shimoda, a document examiner and head of the Postal Service Crime Lab. In relatively short order, Shimoda authenticated the letter, saying it was indeed authored by the same man who had written the previous Zodiac letters. Additionally, Toschi sought out the opinion of then-retired document examiner Sherwood Morrill, who had done so much of the previous handwriting authentication in the Zodiac case. Morrill

concurred that the letter was authentic, saying “I looked over the thing very carefully and compared it with all the other letters.”³

Dear Editor

*This is the Zodiac speaking I
am back with you. Tell herb caen
I am here, I have always been here.
that city pig toschi is good but
I am bu smarter and better he
will get tired then leave me
alone. I am waiting for a good
movie about me. Who will play
me. I am now in control of all
things.*

Yours truly:

*– guess
SFPD 0*

Figure 10.1: The contents of the “I Am Back with You” Letter

Immediately, two additional inspectors were assigned to help Toschi. In San Francisco, the hunt for the Zodiac was more active than it had been in several years.

10.2 The Toschi Debacle

Being the only person working on the case when the letter arrived, Toschi’s reactions were understandably animated. He made public statements such as: “I could feel the excitement in my body as soon as I saw [the letter],” and “... at least now I know that all our work all these years definitely has not been in vain.”⁴

Between the enthusiasm exhibited in these statements and the immediate injection of additional resources into the investigation that previously had been solely Toschi’s burden to bear, one could easily argue that Toschi was excited by and benefiting from the arrival of the apparent Zodiac letter. And interestingly, the Zodiac apparently did something that he had never done before: referred to a member of law enforcement by name. In fact, he didn’t just refer to Toschi, he complimented the inspector.

The circumstances surrounding the newly arrived letter, and Toschi’s reaction to it, were curious but little more—except to one

person: Armistead Maupin. Maupin had been a writer for the *Chronicle*. He knew something about Inspector Toschi that few others knew, and that something was enough to make him question Toschi's involvement with the letter.

In 1976, Maupin wrote a popular serial for the *Chronicle* called "Tales from the City." The story line featured a fictional homicide detective named Henry Tandy and his ongoing efforts to capture a serial killer known as Tinkerbelle. Originally, Maupin had spoken with Toschi in order to get some perspective from a real homicide detective. However, after the conversation, Maupin decided it would be a good idea to write Toschi into the series as a senior homicide detective who mentors Tandy. By the time the series was over, Toschi wound up arresting Tandy, who turned out to be the Tinkerbelle killer. Through its run, the series achieved widespread popularity. Inspector Toschi became much more recognizable, and many readers praised Maupin for incorporating an element of realism into the story by including Toschi.

But somewhere in the midst of the series, Toschi had sown the seeds that would, two years hence, bear the fruit of the largest controversy ever to plague the case of the Zodiac. Caught up in his newfound attention, Toschi, a notorious note writer, had written three handwritten notes praising Maupin for including a "real-life homicide inspector" in his column. He signed these notes using fictitious names that were simply products of his imagination. Maupin immediately recognized the handwriting as Toschi's, and he later described feeling embarrassed for the inspector, but nothing else came of it other than Maupin saving the notes.

When the apparent Zodiac letter arrived in April 1978, a letter whose existence clearly benefited the effort which had come to define Toschi's career, and moreover, it included a blurb that praised Toschi, Maupin could not help but wonder if Toschi himself may have been the author. Maupin went to the police and asked them to look into the possibility.

The dynamics of the situation were remarkable. An author who had written a popular story in which a serial killer turns out to be the lead homicide detective whose job it is to find the serial killer, suggests to police that the detective in charge of the Zodiac case is responsible for writing the latest Zodiac letter.

News of the Toschi situation broke in dramatic fashion on July 11. All at once, the public became aware of multiple, troubling revelations involving the case of the Zodiac. There were the details regarding the notes that Toschi had written to Maupin. More significantly, the SFPD Internal Affairs bureau was investigating the possibility that Toschi had written the April 1978 letter. That led Shimoda to question his

claim of the letter's authenticity. And finally, Inspector Toschi was removed from the Zodiac investigation and transferred from the Homicide Division to the Pawn Shop detail.

For his part, Toschi readily admitted penning the notes to Maupin. He explained, "It was kind of like sending fan mail to myself. It was done in a harmless way. I didn't think anyone was going to be hurt by it. It was a vain thing to do, not an intelligent thing. I'm ashamed of it now."³ Not surprisingly, he vehemently denied writing the apparent Zodiac letter.

The fallout from the public release of the information created an especially difficult situation for Toschi. On his way to work one morning, an NBC reporter found him and asked: "Are you in fact the Zodiac?" The twenty-five-year SFPD veteran who had dedicated nine years of his life to bringing the Zodiac to justice was suddenly being forced to spend his time explaining how he was, in fact, *not* the Zodiac.

Making matters worse, SFPD's handling of the situation was indelicate at best. Soon after the revelations that the latest letter was likely a fake, Deputy Police Chief Clem DeAmicis made it known that they were now questioning the authenticity of other letters including the 1974 *Exorcist* Letter and "a lot of old Zodiac handwritten letters."⁵ He further explained: "[We] want to know whether they are authentic or whether they [were] written by anybody we know." It is difficult to construe this latter comment as anything but a thinly veiled reference to Toschi. In a seemingly incongruous description, Police Chief Charles Gain later described Toschi's notes to Maupin as "an inordinant [*sic*] scheme for personal aggrandizement," and he labeled Toschi a "disturbed personality."⁶

Clearly, the SFPD had hoped to preemptively lessen the impact of the story surrounding Inspector Toschi. However good their intentions may have been, the result of their actions was to throw Toschi under the proverbial bus. Some influential people within the inner workings of San Francisco took note of the situation and came to the aid of their friend and colleague. Dianne Feinstein, later a US Senator from California, worked in San Francisco city government at the time. She described Toschi as being "crucified" and called the situation "appalling."⁷ *Chronicle* columnist Guy Wright wrote an emotional tribute to Toschi's twenty-five years on the force in an article entitled "Fan letter for Dave Toschi."⁸

After being reassigned to the Pawn Shop detail, Inspector Toschi took three days of sick leave before leaving town on a fortuitously scheduled three-week vacation.

By this time, three document examiners were officially analyzing the alleged Zodiac letter, John Shimoda and two new examiners that

the SFPD had enlisted. Slowly, the three arrived at their respective conclusions and soon-after made those conclusions public. One point was unanimous: Toschi was not the author of the letter.

Shimoda's opinion was perhaps the most interesting, simply because he had originally certified the letter as a legitimate Zodiac communication. He explained: "Further detailed examination of individual letter formations disclosed the questioned handprinting to be close copies to the hand printing in the Zodiac letters.... I am of the opinion that the letter of 4-24-78 was an attempt to duplicate the Zodiac letters and is not authentic." He also pointed out "all the others were on the same 71 / 2-by-ten stationery with the same envelope and watermark. This last one was on standard 81 / 2-by-11 bond and in a legal-sized envelope."⁹

The other two examiners now on the case were Terrence Pascoe from California's Questioned Document Bureau and Keith Woodward who had been chief of the Los Angeles Police Department's Questioned Document section before going into private practice. Both examiners reached conclusions that were similar to Shimoda's. Woodward described the letter as a "carefully drawn copy" that was done "by a person that had access to the printing of the Zodiac."⁹

Chief Gain also asked retired document examiner Sherwood Morrill, the other person who had originally authenticated the letter, to make a reexamination. Morrill, however, refused to be involved any further going so far as to say "I'm no longer going to look at anything from SFPD."⁹ Interestingly, he added that he had not changed his mind regarding the letter's authenticity.

Additionally, state document examiners also recertified the 1974 *Exorcist* Letter as well as other previous Zodiac missives. Despite earlier, seemingly contradictory statements, Deputy Chief DeAmicis claimed that Toschi was only investigated in connection with the apparently fraudulent letter.

Inspector Toschi had been cleared of wrongdoing, apart from anonymously writing fan letters to Maupin. With the relevant experts deeming the latest letter a fraud, Morrill's opinion notwithstanding, the circumstances reverted to what they had been. The *Exorcist* Letter was the last-known communication from the persona of the Zodiac. The Red Phantom Letter was the last-known missive likely sent by man. Once again, the unknown subject had not been heard from in four years.

Of course, things were not *exactly* as they had been. Everyone involved was significantly worse for the wear. The investigation into the killer had been resurrected, only to be significantly tarnished. Ultimately there was little in the way of wrongdoing. But the chain of events had left a bad taste in the mouths of Bay Area residents. One

writer described the quagmire as an “incredible comic-opera,” a characterization the killer may well have appreciated given his penchant for quoting Gilbert and Sullivan.¹⁰ Likely, many had reached the point where they would be happy with the story of the Zodiac simply going away. To a large extent, that’s exactly what happened.

Notes

1. Duffy Jennings, “Shocking Theory in Zodiac Case,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 24, 1975, 1.
2. Duffy Jennings, “‘Slayer of 14’—A Possible Profile,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1975, 2.
3. Duffy Jennings, “Strange Turn in the Zodiac Case,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1978, 1.
4. Duffy Jennings, “Zodiac Ends Silence—‘I Am Back with You’,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1978, 1.
5. Mike Weiss, “New Zodiac Disclosures,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 14, 1978, 1.
6. “Gain Talks About Toschi,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 18, 1978, 1.
7. Duffy Jennings, “Feinstein Says Toschi’s Being ‘Crucified’,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 15, 1978, 1.
8. Guy Wright, “Fan Letter for Dave Toschi,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, July 23, 1978, B3.
9. Duffy Jennings, “Latest Zodiac Letter a Fake, 3 Experts Say,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 3, 1978, 1.
10. Dwight Chapin, “In Search of an Explanation,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, July 23, 1978, B1.

A Request to the Reader

If you are reading these words, you have quite likely just finished *The Zodiac Revisited, Volume 1*. For this, I wish to express my appreciation. This increasingly busy world inundates each of us with a never-ending supply of subjects that vie for our attention. That you chose to spend some of your valuable time reading the book that I labored over for a considerable part of my life means a great deal to me. *I thank you.*

Before letting you move on, please allow me to ask a favor. As an independent author, the primary hope I have for achieving some modest degree of success lies in convincing readers of *The Zodiac Revisited* to review the work. As someone who has just read the last word of the last page, you are an ideal candidate.

Therefore, I would like to ask that you **please take a few minutes to document your thoughts about *The Zodiac Revisited* in the form of a review.** Doing so will be helpful not only to me, but also to the thousands of people each year who develop a fascination with history's most enigmatic serial killer.

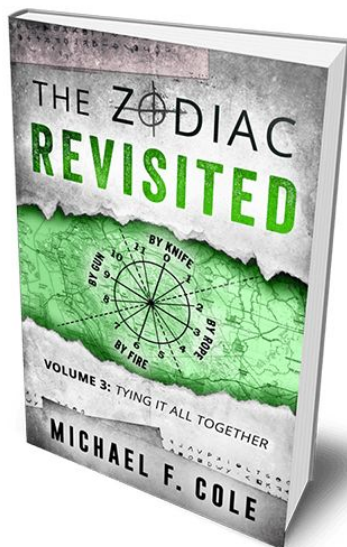
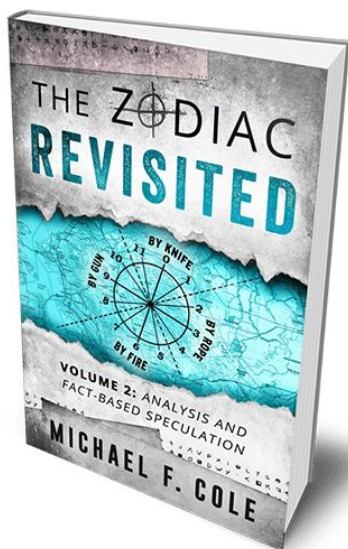
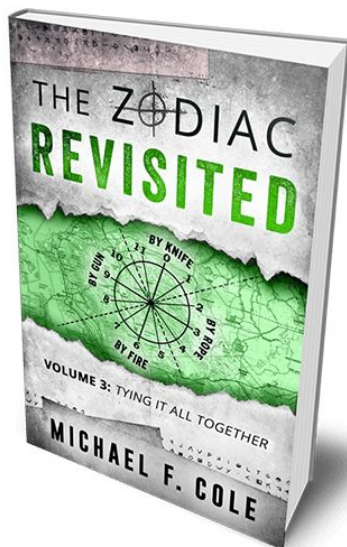
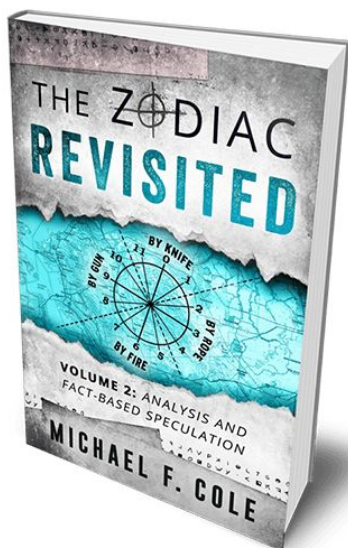
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<http://zodiacrevisited.com/review-vol1>

Thank you for your time and consideration.

—Michael F. Cole

Be sure to get the rest of the story with *The Zodiac Revisited Volumes 2 and 3...*



<http://zodiacrevisited.com/vol2>

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*See Section 5.2.4 of *The Zodiac Revisited, Volume 2* for a probable decipherment.

*The Zodiac's 340 cipher was finally solved on December 5, 2020. For more information, visit: <http://zodiacrevisited.com/book/340-solution>.

**No, it is not lost on me that *I* am one such person.

*The switchboard operator who took the call was a young woman named Nancy Slover . Nancy passed away in 2011. During the production of *Zodiac* (2007), she served as a consultant; consequently, the depiction of the statement in the movie is accurate. A sound file of Nancy re-creating the Zodiac's call, including the taunting "Good-bye" is available at: zodiackiller.com.

† This location is the boundary between the second and third sections of the cipher. Apparently, the killer inadvertently omitted a word when making the transition. I believe that the word he intended to have at this point is “people.”

‡ For reasons that are ultimately unknown—but, nonetheless, remain the subject of much speculation—the killer would never again write to the *Examiner* .

*There is no reason to believe Cecelia Shepard's association with Riverside, California, is in any way related to the Zodiac's possible involvement with the city.

*On December 5, 2020, the three person team of David Oranchak, Sam Blake, and Jarl Van Eycke finally solved the Zodiac's 340 cipher. More information is available at <http://zodiacrevisited.com/book/340-solution>

*Some people choose to disbelieve Kathleen's recounting of these events. For reasons that I describe in Section 3.8 of *The Zodiac Revisited, Volume 3*, I believe her.

*The student interviewed by the newspaper described the group as himself plus a few friends.

*Interestingly, Roed made this description in response to an APB issued by the Vallejo Police Department in the wake of the Zodiac's initial murders on Lake Herman Road .23,24

† In 1964, Roed was a Detective Inspector. By 1968—the time of the previously mentioned letter—he had risen to the rank of Chief of Police.

*Based on total ticket sales, adjusted for inflation.

*There is some evidence that the killer may have sent some communiqués to the *Chronicle* in later years, but these communications are unauthenticated and not considered to be part of the accepted Zodiac writings.